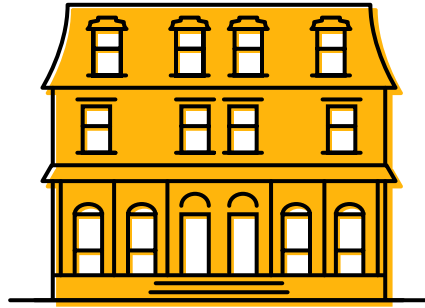


SECTION TWO



**I want to**

**IMPROVE AND MAINTAIN THE  
DESIGN QUALITY AND CHARACTER**

**in my neighborhood.**

# BACKGROUND

**One of the most common things voiced during community conversations was that people care about the “character” of their neighborhood. These are the things that distinguish one neighborhood from another, whether it’s the types of buildings you see when you’re there, the places where people gather, or the trees and streets and sidewalks that knit those places together.**

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In Strawberry Mansion, community members praised the rows of beautiful old mansions, right across from Fairmount Park; in Powelton Village, a common theme was the walkability of the area and the approachable scale of the older homes; in Chinatown, people mentioned the cultural landmarks that distinguish their neighborhood from others. In some communities, there was a sense that something from earlier eras has been lost—whether it’s a prominent building, or entire blocks of 19th-century homes, or a sense of civic pride—but in just about every neighborhood, people agreed that there was something distinctive about where they live, and that their community’s older buildings and parks in particular help to define their neighborhood. Where the first perspective in this toolkit—caring for your older home—looks at one building at a time, this perspective challenges us to think about how all of the pieces of a neighborhood fit together, and to balance competing interests in a way that strengthens the community’s overall character.

In technical terms, this perspective involves things like design guidelines, zoning ordinances, historic preservation policies, tax credits, and city plans—and for each of those topics, there are plenty of resources. But ultimately, this perspective focuses on the ways in which community members, as individuals or as a team, can identify the things that make their neighborhood special and the ways that they can help to maintain and improve those qualities.

It is important to acknowledge that sometimes the tools used to preserve character on a neighborhood-wide basis bring up questions that can be off-putting for long-term residents, developers, and newcomers alike. Some feel that preservation, as it has been typically defined, leads to increased property values, displacement, and/or overly-restrictive and expensive requirements on alterations or new development. This doesn’t have to be the case, however. This section walks through some of the resources and opportunities to make neighborhood preservation work for all neighbors, balancing new development with the existing buildings, character, and communities that make Philadelphia’s neighborhoods unique.



## ASK AND ANSWER

### Who determines what a new building/development looks like?

Ultimately, the zoning code sets the guidelines for the shape and size of buildings in Philadelphia (and most cities). Zoning also determines what type of uses (for example, homes, stores, offices, or parks) are allowed on each property (known as a “parcel”). Every parcel in the city has an owner, and the owner chooses how to maintain or develop that piece of land. Ownership changes every day across the city, but these changes are not always obvious unless the owner chooses to change the site’s buildings or use, in which case zoning comes into play.

Philadelphia’s first zoning code was written in 1933. (It is worth noting that much of Philadelphia was constructed before zoning codes existed, which explains why different parts of the city have different scales of buildings and development.) After many years in need of an update, the City’s Planning Commission updated the zoning code in 2012, with extensive input from neighborhood, government, business, professional, and civic leaders. The zoning designations that exist now are the result of this rewrite. They are designed to encourage development that complements its context, all while meeting Philadelphia’s housing and commercial development goals. The zoning changes also established the Registered Community

Organization (RCO) process, which ensures that communities are involved in determining how future development happens in their neighborhood. (You can learn more about how to join or become involved in your neighborhood RCO on page 36.)

### I’m worried about the future of a building in my neighborhood. What can I do?

It’s never a bad time to advocate for neighborhood preservation, but too often, neighbors only find out that a building is threatened when the notices are posted. Unfortunately, once a demolition permit application has been filed, there are limited options to change course, beyond persuading the property owner to change his or her plans or filing an appeal to the demolition permit. That’s why it’s important to stay in touch with your community organizations! It’s an important and valuable way to share information and keep an eye out for the signs of risk for a property. Although your local community organization may not have the power or legal standing to alter the plans, it is still worth communicating with them. Together, for example, you could reach out to City Council to advocate for a more sensitive plan.

If a demolition permit application has not yet been filed, however, one option for community advocates is to submit a nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places (as well as a pending nomination for designation) can slow down the process, as the Philadelphia Historical Commission determines whether it should have some role in reviewing the demolition permits for the building. For more information about designation, see pages 12-13.

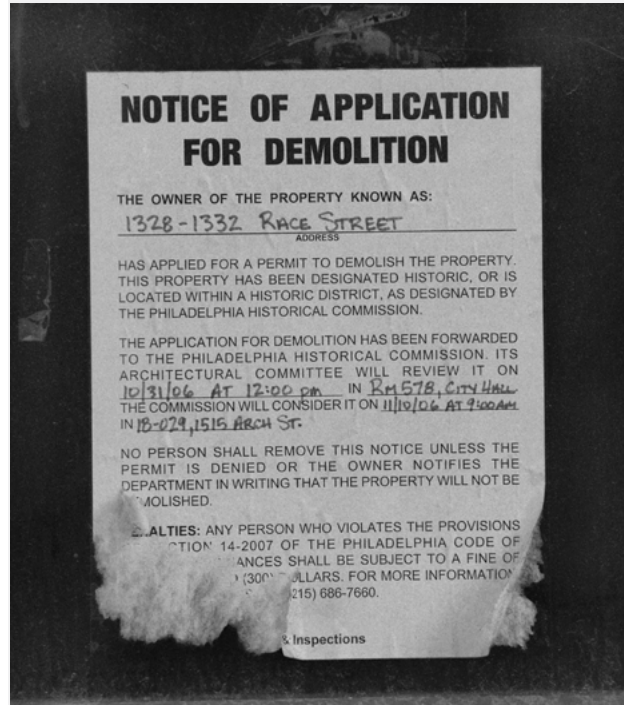
If your neighborhood doesn't have experience in this area, it may be worth hiring an architectural historian to prepare the nomination. (Anyone can submit a nomination, but an architectural historian may be able to determine the strongest case for significance.) The staff of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Preservation Pennsylvania, and/or the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission may be able to direct you to a reliable architectural historian. Talk to the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission to determine if they are aware of any other pending nominations for that property, to coordinate efforts.

Once the nomination is submitted, staff from the Philadelphia Historical Commission will review the draft for its accuracy and completeness—they may ask for clarifications or edits. Once the staff member signs off on this first step, the nomination then progresses to a review by the Designation Committee. The Designation Committee reviews nominations periodically and offers a recommendation (nothing more, nothing less) in favor or against designation to the full Philadelphia Historical Commission. The Commission then reviews the nomination at one of its monthly meetings; the members of the Commission are not required to follow the recommendation of the Designation Committee, so they may overrule the Designation Committee at times, in favor of or against designation.

Throughout this process, show up! Rally your neighbors to show up to the meetings of the Designation Committee and Philadelphia Historical Commission—these hearings are public, and you are the public. You can find out about upcoming meetings and agendas by signing up for the Philadelphia Historical Commission's email list on the agency's website. Show

up and show your support for the designation of the property. (Depending on how contentious a situation it is, the property owner may bring his or her own team to argue against designation. As neighbors of a nominated property, you can offer an important voice in support of designation.)

It is important to note that in certain cases, the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L & I) may determine that a property is imminently dangerous—this decision takes over the authority of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, as it means that L & I has determined that the threat to public safety should be the primary factor in the future of the building. In these cases, a land-use lawyer can file an appeal to object to L & I's determination.



## What is the best way to ensure that my neighborhood retains its historic fabric?

Most advocates would agree that the strongest way to protect a community's significant older buildings is to designate a piece of the neighborhood as a historic district. However, community members sometimes feel this type of designation might bring with it some unwanted or unintended consequences. Some of the benefits and other information about designation are listed on the next page.

## Other than designation as a historic district, what are some other ways to ensure the quality of my neighborhood's architecture?

NOTE: The Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation is considering additions to, or revisions of, these options, so stay tuned to their recommendations! They may ultimately recommend even more alternatives than the options below.

The goal of designating a property or historic district on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places is to preserve the historic fabric (buildings, sites, etc.) that make up that property or district. Designating a property in this way means that the Philadelphia Historical Commission will review any work that requires a building permit and affects the exterior of a property. (This does not affect any work on the interior of a building.) Designation as a historic district can ensure that the block or neighborhood keeps its quality as a whole and still feels like an older place that has history.

Districts can also recognize cultural and thematic connections between properties, in addition to geographical connections. For example, the Historic Street Paving Thematic District recognizes the most intact old streets in Philadelphia, so that we don't lose the earliest traces of the city's cobblestone, wood, and Belgian block streets.

If you're less concerned about regulating the buildings that are already standing, and more concerned about new construction specifically, then your neighborhood could consider creating a conservation district. (Since conservation districts were introduced in Philadelphia, five have been created: Queen Village, Central Roxborough, Overbrook Farms, Powelton Village, and Ridge Park.) Conservation districts offer an opportunity for a neighborhood to evaluate new development and new construction, yet they do not forbid the demolition of existing buildings. In this way, conservation districts are more flexible regarding the treatment of older buildings, but they also mean that the community has less power to intervene in the demolition of an older building. The overall goal of a conservation district is to make sure that a neighborhood keeps its overall visual character, with both old and new construction. You can read more about historic districts versus conservation districts at the website below.

### **Philadelphia City Planning Conservation Districts**

[phila.gov/CityPlanning/resources/Publications/Conservation%20districts%20fact%20sheet.pdf](http://phila.gov/CityPlanning/resources/Publications/Conservation%20districts%20fact%20sheet.pdf)

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One other path you might consider as a community is the creation of design guidelines. For an example of this, look to the guidelines published by Old City District and the City of Baltimore. See the Preservation Win on page 43 for more on Old City's design guidelines.

## Old City District Design Guidelines

[oldcitydistrict.org/oldcitydesignguide](http://oldcitydistrict.org/oldcitydesignguide)

## City of Baltimore Historic Preservation Design Guidelines

[chap.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/07.18.2017%20-%20CHAP%20Design%20Guidelines.pdf](http://chap.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/07.18.2017%20-%20CHAP%20Design%20Guidelines.pdf)

Design guidelines are generally not regulatory, meaning there might not be any authority to enforce them, but they can be a useful tool in encouraging developers, architects, property owners, and others to create designs that complement, rather than contradict, what already exists in a neighborhood. They can also be a useful resource for RCOs when they hear presentations about new developments; design guidelines could be a helpful rubric to evaluate these proposed projects whenever developers seek support for their designs.

## What are the benefits of being a local historic district?

Designation provides some benefits. In addition to the satisfaction that comes with owning a historic landmark, and the community pride fostered by the recognition of a historic district, recent studies in Philadelphia have shown that property values in historic districts fluctuate less and increase more than those of comparable properties outside districts, in part because every property is protected from the effects of inappropriate alterations at neighboring properties. Also, the Historical Commission provides free historical and technical assistance to the owners of designated properties.

## What is the difference between the National Register of Historic Places and the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places?

For more information about designation, see pages 12-13.

## Would my neighbors be forced to restore their property if it is designated?

No. The Historical Commission cannot unilaterally force a property owner to undertake work, except in the very rare case that neglect threatens the survival of the historic resource. For more information about designation, see pages 12-13.

## Does historic designation affect my neighborhood's property tax assessments?

No. Historic designation is not a factor in the assessment of property by the City of Philadelphia, and will not result in higher property taxes. (Recent property tax increases are based on the city's Actual Value Initiative reappraisals. These reappraisals take into account the market trends of property values, as well as exterior inspections of a property's size, condition, improvements, and new construction.)

## What financial incentives are available for my neighborhood to rehab its older buildings?

Although these three programs do not represent all of the potential incentives for small businesses, a few programs that may be available to owners of older commercial properties include...

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### **The Storefront Improvement Program**

This program is local to Philadelphia and administered by the city's Department of Commerce. See the Take Action steps on page 54 for more information.

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### **The Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program**

The program is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). This competitive tax credit program is awarded based on various eligibility criteria, and credits are awarded equitably for projects in each region of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

[dced.pa.gov/programs/historic-preservation-tax-credit-hptc](http://dced.pa.gov/programs/historic-preservation-tax-credit-hptc)

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### **The Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit**

The program is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and the National Park Service. This program provides

a 20% income tax credit to developers of “income-producing” properties, including office buildings, retail establishments, rental apartments, and more. It does not apply to private owner-occupied homes. More information on the eligibility requirements and process is available on the PHMC website.

[phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/Federal-Tax-Credits.aspx](http://phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/Federal-Tax-Credits.aspx)

## What is the 10-year tax abatement?

The 10-year abatement of Real Estate Taxes was enacted in 1997. For residential and commercial properties, it exempts from tax the added value from new construction or rehabilitation—the improvements of a property, based on an assessment. This exemption allows the property owner to pay no tax on the improvements for the full 10-year period. Those receiving abatements do continue to pay taxes on the value of the land.

In 2017, over half of the uses of the abatement was for new construction; the remaining uses of the abatement were for existing housing stock that was upgraded or stabilized. Still, many advocates feel that the abatement works in opposition to preservation goals, since the economic incentives of new construction outweigh those of rehabbing older buildings—at least in the short term. Many of these older buildings are in zoning districts that allow for greater height and density, and yet they are not designated to delay or prevent demolition. As a result, Philadelphia's older, undesignated building stock is often prone to demolition in favor of new construction that will make use of the tax abatement.

Many projects have successfully combined preservation and the abatement, so it is possible for the program to serve as a complement to older homes. The City continues to consider adjustments to the abatement, but the future of the abatement remains uncertain. The best way to advocate for a change in this policy is to work with your local civic association, registered community organization, and council person.



*I'm more concerned about affordable housing than historic preservation in my neighborhood. How does this toolkit help with that issue?*

Historic preservation and affordable housing are not competing issues: in fact, they can be very useful to think about together. It is often less expensive to repair older buildings than to demolish and build new construction, which means that investing in older buildings can be the most affordable type of housing. (From a financial perspective, rehabbing an older building to serve as affordable housing may also offer twice the opportunity for financial incentives, as developers may be able to use both affordable housing and historic rehabilitation tax credits to offset the costs of the project.) For more about the link between

affordable housing and historic preservation, you can read articles like this one by economist Donovan Rypkema, and another by advocate Stephanie Meeks.

**Donovan Rypkema**

[placeeconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/placeeconomics-pub2003b.pdf](http://placeeconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/placeeconomics-pub2003b.pdf)

**Stephanie Meeks**

[citylab.com/equity/2017/06/historic-preservation-density-demolition/529821](http://citylab.com/equity/2017/06/historic-preservation-density-demolition/529821)

Beyond these economic reasons to reconsider the connections between affordable housing and historic preservation, there are also environmental, social, architectural, and cultural justifications to embrace investing in Philadelphia's older buildings to achieve affordability—the same motivations discussed throughout this toolkit. So if you consider yourself an advocate for affordable housing, there are lots of reasons to consider yourself an advocate for neighborhood preservation as well.





## TRY IT OUT

Look up your house or neighborhood's zoning on the City's Atlas website.

Go to the City's Atlas website to see a whole lot of information about Philadelphia's buildings and infrastructure. Each zoning type has a full description of its appearance and allowable uses on this site.

Enter in your home address and you can see the deeds, past zoning permits, and the zoning classification for your property. For example, many rowhomes are considered RSA-5, which stands for "Residential Single Family Attached - 5".

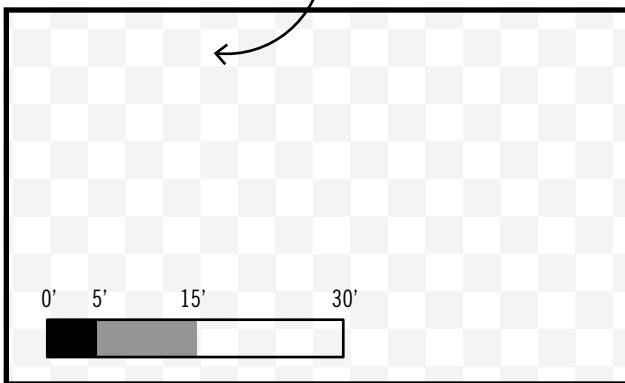
### Philadelphia Zoning

[phila.gov/li/Pages/Zoning.aspx](http://phila.gov/li/Pages/Zoning.aspx)

### Philadelphia Atlas

[atlas.phila.gov](http://atlas.phila.gov)

*sketch a floor plan of your house here if it helps!*



1

## YOUR HOME

Take some time to fill in some basic information by responding to the questions below. This will give you a much better sense of your home.

1

Lot Width

2

Lot Area

3

Open Area

4

Front Setback

5

Rear Yard Depth

6

Height (Maximum)

2

## TAKE A WALK AROUND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

Document or take photos of things you think look complementary, or out of place.

\_\_\_\_\_

Mark down the “out of place” properties and look them up on Atlas. This can help you learn about how these came to be and help you learn how to prevent development like this from happening in the future, if that is your goal.

3

## LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

Visit [PhilaGeoHistory.org](http://PhilaGeoHistory.org) to look at historic maps to learn more about what your neighborhood used to be like and who used to live there.



## TAKE ACTION

### Attend meetings of your neighborhood's civic association or Registered Community Organization (RCO)

Developers are often required to present their proposed projects at public RCO meetings, so these meetings are a key opportunity to voice your opinion on projects that might affect the character of your neighborhood. You can also join your RCO's zoning committee to have more of a stake in the organization's decisions. If you don't know your local RCO, you can find a list and map on the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's website.

#### **The Philadelphia City Planning Commission's RCO Map**

[phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/Pages/RegisteredCommunityOrganizations.aspx](http://phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/Pages/RegisteredCommunityOrganizations.aspx)

### Read up on the district plan for your neighborhood that was created by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission for their Philadelphia2035 plan

This plan sets a vision and goals for managing growth and development in the City of Philadelphia.

The overall Philadelphia2035 plan was adopted in 2011, and in the years since, the Planning Commission has been working on 18 strategic "District Plans," which break down the overall plan into more detail for each district. These district plans guide the priorities for citizens, community leaders, and elected officials, and have an effect on the quality and character of each neighborhood. The final district plan, for the Upper Northwest, is in the final stages as of 2018. Find all the other plans below.

#### **The Philadelphia City Planning Commission's Philadelphia2035 Plan**

[phila2035.org/plan](http://phila2035.org/plan)

### See if your neighborhood has a local historical society to support or join

Neighborhoods all over the city feature these organizations, which range from informal networks to official nonprofit groups—they may be useful teammates as you think about improving and maintaining the character of your neighborhood.

### Apply to participate in the Citizens Planning Institute (CPI)

CPI is a seven-week course (offered twice a year) that offers an introduction to city planning, zoning, the development process, and special topics. This course is offered by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, with a mission to empower citizens to take a more effective and active role in shaping the future of their neighborhoods and the city.

#### **The Citizens Planning Institute**

[citizensplanninginstitute.org](http://citizensplanninginstitute.org)



## Join a Friends group. Many neighborhoods have “Friends” groups to support everything from parks, to schools, to libraries

There is a Friends group for almost every park in the city, and many have cropped up for schools and libraries too. Getting involved with these organizations may seem specific to the place, but advocating for better parks, schools, recreation centers, and libraries will help improve and maintain the neighborhood bit by bit.

## Be a public correspondent for your community

Attend the public meetings and/or join the listservs of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Stay tuned to any agenda items that may affect your community—and report back! These city agencies play significant roles in how our neighborhoods grow and change over time, so if you are interested in improving and maintaining the character of your own neighborhood, these are important agencies to pay attention to. The Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) is responsible for properties that are on or nominated to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission

(PCPC) creates plans for neighborhoods and sections of the city. The Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) hears and decides appeals in zoning matters, considers special exceptions, and grants variances. (See the Learn More pages in this section for some press outlets that report on, and can help explain, the work of these agencies.)

## Be a part of the Jumpstart Training Program

If you want to have a direct role in redeveloping the distinctive older places in your neighborhood, apply to be a part of the Jumpstart Training Program, an initiative spearheaded by Philly Office Retail. The program trains novice developers and connects them with more experienced real estate professionals to help them revitalize their neighborhoods. Jumpstart began in Germantown, and has now expanded to include four additional neighborhoods: Southwest Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, North Philly West, and Kensington.

### Jumpstart Training Program

[gojumpstart.org](http://gojumpstart.org)

## Organize a neighborhood cleanup

One of the greatest contributors to neighborhood quality is the upkeep of public space: streets, sidewalks, parks, etc. Grab a group of neighbors and friends to pick up trash and sweep sidewalks on a weekday evening or a Saturday morning and feel good about contributing to your neighborhood’s appearance. Try to make this a weekly or biweekly meet up if you can. If your neighborhood has a local institution with a large property to maintain—including a school, library, or house of worship—see if you can include them in your cleanup day.

If there is an important building or place in your neighborhood, check to see whether that local landmark is included on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, which generally ensures that it remains standing long into the future

The Philadelphia Register of Historic Places is the comprehensive inventory of buildings, structures, sites, objects (e.g. significant public art), interiors, and districts that the Philadelphia Historical Commission has designated as historic. You can look up the property on the map via the Philadelphia Historical Commission website.

**The Philadelphia Register of Historic Places**

[phila.gov/historical/register/Pages/default.aspx](http://phila.gov/historical/register/Pages/default.aspx)

If you feel that other properties in your neighborhood deserve designation, consider joining with neighbors to apply for a neighborhood-level designation as a historic district. For more information about designation (as either an individual property or as a historic district), see pages 12-13 and 30-31.





## LEARN MORE

### For anyone interested in keeping up with planning and development news in Philadelphia

Follow PlanPhilly, Hidden City, and Curbed Philly, three of the best websites to keep up with planning, zoning, development, design, and preservation news in Philadelphia. The reporters for these websites keep up with all the complicated public policies and important community-based issues, and they are good at explaining these stories to the general public.

#### **PlanPhilly**

[planphilly.com](http://planphilly.com)

#### **Hidden City**

[HiddenCityPhila.org](http://HiddenCityPhila.org)

#### **Curbed Philly**

[philly.curbed.com](http://philly.curbed.com)

### For community advocates to learn from each other

The Local Preservation School is an online “open learning environment” where preservation advocates and volunteers share how they have saved and sustained historic places in their communities.

#### **The Local Preservation School**

[localpreservation.github.io/about](http://localpreservation.github.io/about)



### For understanding the difference among the various agencies in the City of Philadelphia

Read the *Philadelphia Zoning Code Quick Reference Manual*, and check out the “Who’s Who?” section at the back of this toolkit. The *Zoning Code Quick Reference Manual* contains examples of what zoning “looks like” and all of the various agencies and technical terms involved in the process. The short version: the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) is responsible for properties that are on or nominated to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) creates plans for neighborhoods and sections of the city. The Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) hears and decides appeals in zoning matters, considers special exceptions, and grants variances.

#### **Philadelphia Register of Historic Places**

#### **Zoning Code Manual**

[bit.ly/2AdN2II](http://bit.ly/2AdN2II)

## For submitting a nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

In addition to the information available on the Philadelphia Historical Commission’s website, you can learn more by reading the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia’s guide to *How to Nominate an Individual Building, Structure, Site, or Object to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places*.

### **Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia’s Guide to How to Nominate**

[preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PA\\_Nominations\\_Online.pdf](http://preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PA_Nominations_Online.pdf)

## For related job opportunities

If you’re interested in learning more and supporting the job opportunities of architectural salvage, check out Philadelphia Community Corps, which offers job training and career development opportunities for entry-level and re-entry job candidates who face barriers to employment. The Corps’ trainees learn about sustainable maintenance, reclamation, and up-cycling of architectural salvage.

### **Philadelphia Community Corps**

[philadelphiacommunitycorps.org/job-training-and-career-development-in-construction-trades](http://philadelphiacommunitycorps.org/job-training-and-career-development-in-construction-trades)

## For a building that has been abandoned by its owner

If there is a particular building in your neighborhood that has deteriorated significantly and appears to have been abandoned, it may be worth exploring your options under Pennsylvania’s Act 135, the Blighted and Abandoned Property Conservatorship law. This law (which passed in 2008) aims to restore neglected properties to productive use. It allows a petitioner to ask a judge for conservatorship over an abandoned property. Because this is a legal tool to address neighborhood quality, you should consult a lawyer to learn more.

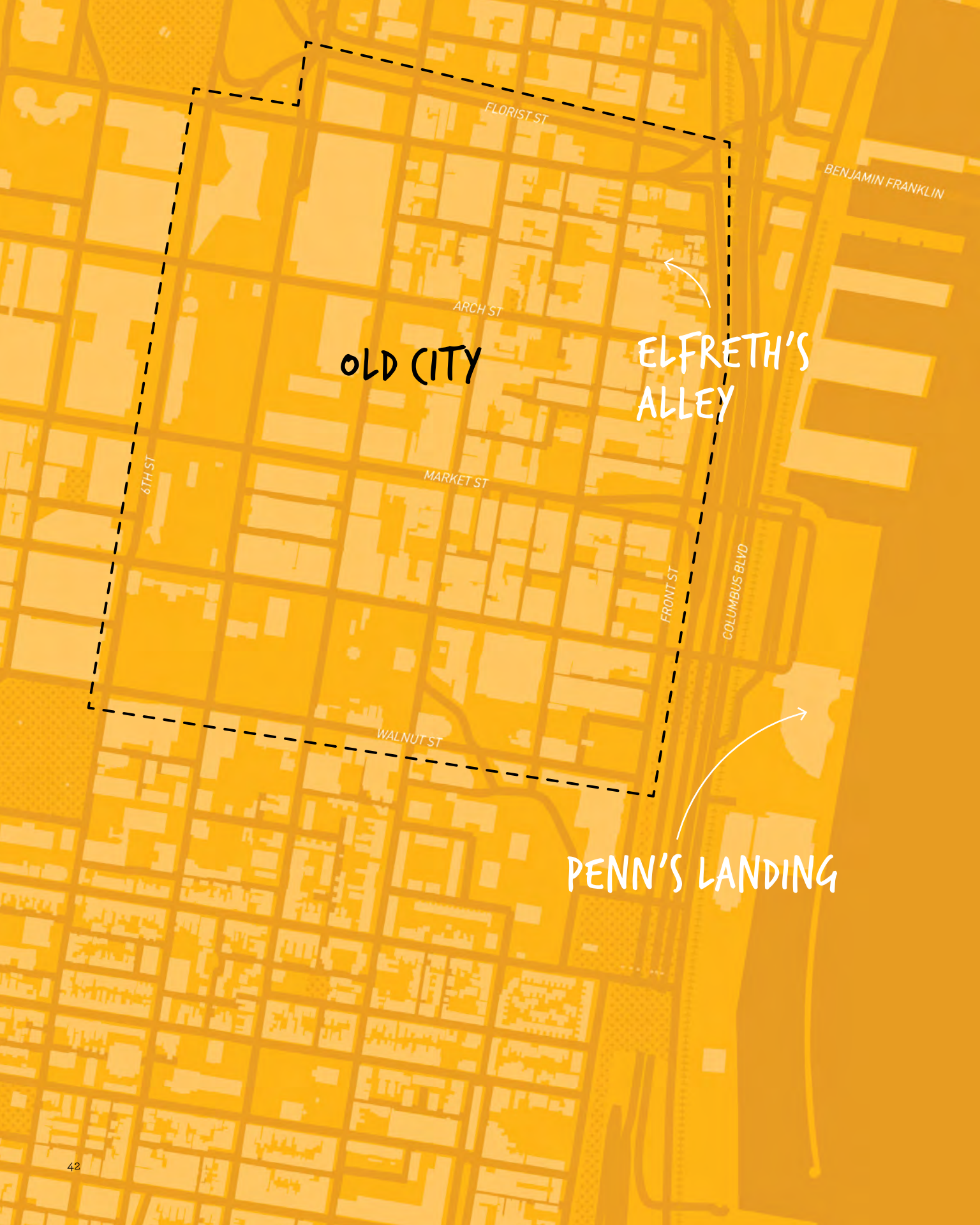
## For properties that are vacant and abandoned

The Philadelphia Land Bank was established in 2013 in an effort to “return land in public ownership to private reuse.” (The first properties were added to the Land Bank in 2015.) In practical terms, land banking requires a lot of property title administration for vacant and tax-delinquent properties—a process that takes a while, especially since there are an estimated 43,000 vacant lots and unoccupied properties in Philadelphia. For this reason, the Land Bank has faced challenges in ramping up the pace of acquiring and reselling vacant properties. But in the long term, community advocates still hope that the Philadelphia Land Bank can be a useful tool in their efforts to revitalize neighborhoods.

### **Philadelphia Land Bank**

[philadelphialandbank.org](http://philadelphialandbank.org)





OLD CITY

ELFRETH'S ALLEY

PENN'S LANDING

FLORIST ST

ARCH ST

MARKET ST

WALNUT ST

8TH ST

FRONT ST

COLUMBUS BLVD

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



## OLD CITY DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDE

**A**S ITS NAME CAN ATTEST, THE neighborhood of Old City has a lot of old buildings—residential, industrial, institutional, etc. In recent decades, the neighborhood has also seen a wave of redevelopment in the form of adaptive reuse (reusing old buildings for new purposes) and new construction.

In response to all of this construction and its impact on the neighborhood’s character, the Old City District (a registered community organization and special services district) published the Old City Design Guide in 2017. The guide is a resource, rather than a regulatory tool, for developers, architects, and property owners. As such, it does not dictate any specific building styles or types, but it does emphasize some general principles to encourage designs that complement—rather than compete with—the historic fabric of the neighborhood. The guide is part of Old City District’s overall “Vision2026” strategic plan, with the overall goal of ensuring that “the whole of Old City is greater than the sum of its parts.”

The design guide begins with four imperatives for building: build for 100 years; build harmonious variety; build a street, not only a building; and



build for people. It then offers recommendations for new buildings, shopfront designs, and curbside options. It highlights examples of good (and less-than-good) projects in the neighborhood, and demonstrates how both old and new buildings can contribute to the design quality and character of a neighborhood.

### **The Old City Design Guide**

[oldcitydistrict.org/oldcitydesignguide](http://oldcitydistrict.org/oldcitydesignguide)



## SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT

**W**ONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE IN A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT? With active partners in the Spring Garden Civic Association and the Spring Garden Community Development Corporation (CDC), the Spring Garden neighborhood offers a good example of a typical Philadelphia rowhouse neighborhood that retains its character and design quality, thanks in part to the designation in 2001 of the Spring Garden Historic District on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Here are some examples of buildings within the district where property owners have successfully gotten their construction or rehabilitation work approved by the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC). (A reminder: the PHC cannot force property owners to make renovations; they get involved when a property owner gets building permits for a project within the historic district boundaries.)



### 2001 Spring Garden Street

#### Adaptive Reuse

Located on a prominent corner, this former church was a very important preservation priority for community members and local organizations. A new owner proposed its conversion to apartments, and planned to keep many of the stained glass windows. The PHC approved the removal of some (but not all) of the stained-glass panes. They were replaced with clear glass for the new apartments. Thanks to this project, this striking building has been adaptively reused and continues to give character to the Spring Garden neighborhood.

### 1711-1713 Mount Vernon Street

#### Rehabilitation

When the owner planned renovations to these buildings (plus 10 other properties on the block), an affordable housing development, PHC oversaw the removal of paint from the masonry walls, the restoration of window and door openings, and the installation of new windows and doors. The Spring Garden CDC also encouraged the owner to replace the buildings' missing sills and lintels with marble in order to be compatible with the surviving materials elsewhere on the building. The project earned a 2018 Grand Jury Award from the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.



## 1603-1605 Mount Vernon Street

### New Construction

Who said that new construction couldn't happen in historic districts? In this case, PHC had partial oversight for the design of these new buildings, which now blend seamlessly with their neighbors. (PHC's level of input is based on the status of the properties when the district was nominated; in this case, they were vacant lots at the time of designation.) The Spring Garden Community Development Corporation sold the lots for new construction, setting some conditions for the new owner to make sure the buildings complemented the older buildings in the neighborhood. Next door, 1607 Mount Vernon Street was fully rehabilitated around the same time.

## 2034 Fairmount Avenue

### Reconstruction and Rehabilitation

The property owner worked with PHC to reconstruct the front façade with salvaged brick, replace the windows, and review plans for the new storefront, which was replaced with a cornice salvaged from Old City. The owner worked in partnership with Spring Garden Community Development Corporation and with support from the Department of Commerce's Storefront Improvement Program and The Merchants Fund. The project earned a 2016 Grand Jury Award from the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and a 2016 Best Overall Award from the Community Design Collaborative's Storefront Challenge.

PHILADELPHIA  
MUSEUM OF ART