

SECTION FIVE



I want to

CREATE CHANGE AND INFLUENCE POLICY

in my neighborhood.



BACKGROUND

This section is for all the people who are passionate about the value of the city’s neighborhood fabric, the importance of maintaining neighborhood character, the significance of keeping commercial corridors and businesses active, and the importance of sharing history, but feel that accomplishing these goals is challenging without broader support across the neighborhood. In Philadelphia, change happens when public support—across a range of citizens—can turn the tide of the status quo. This section of the toolkit includes resources to get even more involved, and information about fellow advocates who may join your cause.

As with all of the contents of this toolkit, this section may change over time as different policies change—in fact, this section of the toolkit may be revised in the future to reflect the policies that you changed. But there is always a starting point, and hopefully this can be yours.



ASK AND ANSWER

How do I get involved in my neighborhood?

There are so many ways to be involved in the City of Philadelphia. The most direct way is to become involved in the local civic association, also known as neighborhood associations and/or residents' associations. These organizations, which include mostly volunteers and folks that live in the neighborhood, work on an array of programs to support neighborhoods. They often focus on public events, cleanliness and beautification, and public safety. Many of these organizations are also the Registered Community Organization (RCO) for their neighborhood, but not always. Also, nearly every neighborhood has one or more "Friends" groups to support, provide services for, and advocate for neighborhood parks, schools, libraries, and other neighborhood assets.

Many parts of Philadelphia are served by an organization that is part of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)'s Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) program. These organizations, many of which are also community development corporations (CDCs), offer incredible resources for learning about the neighborhood and are great places to start. See more information on the website.

Department of Housing and Community Development
ohcdphila.org/neighborhood-resources/neighborhood-advisory-committees

I'm already involved. How do I recruit more advocates?

Finding more allies to support neighborhood issues may be as simple as rallying your neighbors and sharing some of the things you have learned. Whether you are a long-standing or new resident, something as simple as knocking on doors, putting up flyers to raise awareness for an issue, hosting a block party/open house, or starting a Facebook group or NextDoor group can go a long way. Ask around to see if any networks already exist; if they don't, you can start your own. People are busy, but a simple knock and a smile from you can help build connections and trust, which can come in handy when a need arises. Sharing historical images or stories about the neighborhood is a great way to bring people in. For more insight into how to build support in your community, check out the Citizens Toolkit, written by graduates of the Citizens Planning Institute. This guide was created by neighbors, for neighbors, with advice about how to get things done in your own neighborhood.

Citizens Toolkit

citizensplanninginstitute.org/citizens-toolkit



I want to know more about how to make things change at the policy level. What should I do?

Protecting our neighborhoods can only go so far with the incentives and regulations that currently exist. Philadelphia needs friendlier policies for keeping neighborhoods intact, such as incentives for affordable housing, reuse of older buildings, and small business development.

The best way to make change happen at the policy level is to contact your elected officials. This includes your committee person, ward leader, council person and at-large council members, state representative, state senator, and of course, your US Senator and Representative. Philadelphia includes three state Congressional districts (the 1st, 2nd, and 13th Districts). The Committee of 70 is a great resource in Philadelphia for finding out more about voting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and how to get involved at the policy level.

The Committee of 70

seventy.org

How do we connect with younger generations and youth to engage them in the neighborhood's stability?

Young people—from small children to teens to twenty-somethings—care about where they live, too. Empower them to be advocates in your neighborhood by helping them to learn, interpret, and share their own community histories and values. Consider joining or creating a Friends group for your neighborhood school, recreation center, or library to support their youth programming. Volunteer with local after-school programs to encourage neighborhood storytelling and discoveries of community history and architecture. Most importantly in fostering young advocates: let them advocate! Help them learn the tools of public history and community advocacy, and then stand back and let them try those tools out for themselves.





1

DRAW A MAP OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

TRY IT OUT

Using different colors or labels, include things like:

- » Where you live
- » Where you work and/or go to school (if your workplace or school is outside the neighborhood, draw an arrow or some kind of symbol to show which direction you commute)
- » The places that make your neighborhood unique
- » The streets and intersections that are the most pleasant to travel (to shop, to walk, to see, etc.)
- » The streets and intersections that are the most difficult or dangerous to travel (because of safety, speeding, etc.)
- » Your favorite sights to see
- » Your favorite places to spend time
- » The places you miss that are no longer around
- » The places or areas that need some attention

As you finish and take a step back, what patterns emerge in your map? Are your favorite places also in an area that needs attention? Do you have more “places that you miss” than “favorite sights to see”, or vice versa? What does your map tell you about the places you would like to advocate for in your neighborhood? Does it suggest partners you could advocate with?



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2

MAP #2. ENLIST A NEIGHBOR OR FAMILY MEMBER.

Ask them to draw their own map. See where similarities appear and where they differ. After all, neighborhood perception often can change from person to person.

3

MAKE A TOP 10 LIST OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

List your Top 10 favorite or most valued places in your neighborhood. Why are they important? Ask yourself, who currently works to manage and maintain these places? How are they funded? These questions will help you determine how you can help make sure they are around for the long term.





TAKE ACTION

Vote!

The most important step that you or any other citizen of Philadelphia and the United States can do to influence decision-making is to vote. Local elections are even more important for determining how your neighborhood functions. Pay attention to mid-term and primaries especially. Keep up with local election news by following the Committee of 70.

The Committee of 70

seventy.org

Get to know your block captain, ward leader, committee persons, and City Council person

These individuals carry a lot of influence in helping to determine your neighborhood's future. You may find your block captain just by asking your neighbors. Your Ward Leaders and committee persons are easily found below.

Philadelphia Ward Leaders

phillywardleaders.com

City Council includes members that represent specific districts and members who serve at large. You can find the current roster of city council members below. Find their contact information and write, call, or email them—whichever you prefer! If you're comfortable speaking in public, you can request to speak for or against a bill at a council meeting by calling the city clerk's office in advance. City Council meetings are also broadcast online and on channel 64.

Philadelphia City Council

phlcouncil.com

Apply to participate in the Citizens Planning Institute (CPI)

This seven-week course (offered twice a year) offers an introduction to city planning, zoning, the development process, and special topics. 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. More information about CPI is available below.

Citizens Planning Institute

citizensplanninginstitute.org

Read the CPI "Citizens Toolkit"

CPI has also developed a guide by neighbors, for neighbors. Read the CPI "Citizens Toolkit" and learn from other neighborhood leaders about how to get things done in your neighborhood!

Citizens Toolkit

citizensplanninginstitute.org/citizens-toolkit

Attend meetings of your neighborhood's civic association and/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. If you don't know your local RCO, you can find a list and map on the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's website.

Philadelphia City Planning Commission RCOs
phila.gov/CityPlanning/projectreviews/Pages/RegisteredCommunityOrganizations.aspx

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. (See the “Learn More” part of this section for some press outlets that report on, and can help explain, the work of these agencies.) 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.

Attend a meeting of the Design Advocacy Group (DAG)

DAG hosts free monthly meetings that are open to the public, featuring presentations, information sharing, and discussion on topics related to planning, architecture, preservation, and the physical development of Philadelphia. You can follow DAG on social media and drop in on any of their monthly gatherings, no advance registration required.

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.

Ask the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia to lead a workshop during a community meeting

Since 2005, the Preservation Alliance's Neighborhood Preservation program has been helping Philadelphia residents and community leaders discover and promote their neighborhood history by identifying landmarks and architectural characteristics that give their neighborhood its own unique sense of place. The list of neighborhoods can be found below.

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Neighborhood List

preservationalliance.com/explore-philadelphia/philadelphia-neighborhoods

Nominate a place to save through the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

"Places to Save" can become part of the Preservation Alliance's advocacy agenda, but they must be submitted by citizens. Any place that is deserving of attention that you feel is at risk can be nominated below.

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

preservationalliance.com/advocacy-in-action/places-to-save/placestosavenomination

Take a second look at your map from the Try It out activities and check to see whether those places are included on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

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. Designation on the Philadelphia Register generally ensures that a building remains standing long into the future. You can look up the places that matter to you on the map via the Philadelphia Historical Commission website.

Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

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. Districts can include properties that are geographically related (e.g. in the same neighborhood) and/or properties that are culturally/thematically related (e.g. the Historic Street Paving Thematic District Inventory, which recognizes the most intact old streets in Philadelphia). Find more information about designation (as either an individual property or as a historic district) on pages 12-13.



LEARN MORE

For information about current preservation policies and recommendations

The Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation was held from September 2017 to December 2018. The Task Force brought together professionals from a variety of disciplines to create recommendations for new policies to improve how preservation functions in the City. The subcommittees included 1) Outreach and Education; 2) Survey; 3) Incentives; and 4) Regulation. More information and supplementary reports can be found at the website.

Please contact your Council person to advocate for the adoption of policies that promote preservation in Philadelphia!

Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation
phlpreservation.org

For an example of a youth history program

Check out History Hunters Youth Reporter Program, a fully-subsidized field trip program for Philadelphia School District 4th and 5th graders. The program is based at Stenton, with several other historic sites and partners involved. The literacy-based program allows students to "hunt" for history by taking part in a variety of hands-on activities and experiences that

bring history to life. As "investigative reporters" on assignment, students gather facts and sketches from their visits for follow-up writing in the classroom.

History Hunters Youth Reporter Program
historyhunters.org

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 (a project of WHYY)
planphilly.com

Hidden City
HiddenCityPhila.org

Curbed Philly
philly.curbed.com

For community advocates to learn from each other

Read the Preservation Pennsylvania publication *How to Protect and Preserve the Historic Places that Matter to You*. This will guide you through the steps and all the potential hurdles you need to know before embarking on a specific project.

Preservation Pennsylvania Guide
preservationpa.org/page.asp?id=54



PHILLY LOVE NOTES/HEARTBOMBING

PHILADELPHIANS TEND TO WEAR their hearts on their sleeves—have you seen our sports fanbases?—but we aren’t always as vocal in our love for the city itself. Philly Love Notes and the Young Friends of the Preservation Alliance’s Heartbombing Campaigns offer two examples of ways to express your love for places that matter...and encourage others to love them, too.

Philly Love Notes began as a website in 2012. Created by Emma Fried-Cassorla, the blog collected submissions of love notes—not to a person, but to a million little places. The website published over 300 tributes to Philadelphia submitted from all over the city, highlighting the quirks that make each neighborhood special: favorite views of the skyline, favorite rowhouse combinations, favorite carved doorways, and more. In 2015, Fried-Cassorla retooled the project—she now publishes a periodic email that highlights reasons #WhyILovePhilly—but her website is still a hopeful and helpful reminder of the places that are important to us, and how we can show our love for them.

Although the Young Friends of the Preservation Alliance (YFPA) didn’t invent the idea of heartbombing campaigns (they actually started in Pittsburgh), the group has made a Valentine

tradition out of the initiative for the past several years. Each February, YFPA decides on a local building or street that needs some love, and volunteers gather to make a flurry of old-fashioned valentines for an old place. They hang them on the local landmark—or several! (In 2016, YFPA heartbombed several buildings in the Sharswood neighborhood, as pictured on the map at right.) The group then organizes a social media campaign to show the love and build interest in the future of the historic building(s). Not every heartbombed building has been saved—Jewelers’ Row, for example, was heartbombed in 2017 and still sits in limbo, facing partial demolition. But the annual campaign can engage more public interest in a project, and preservation wins are worth celebrating. YFPA heartbombed the Hale Building (13th Street/Juniper Street) in 2015, just a few weeks before a developer announced plans to bring the building back to life, and in 2018, YFPA returned to share the love again, in advance of the building’s upcoming ribbon-cutting.

Philly Love Notes

phillylovenotes.com

Organize your own heartbombing campaign

savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-tips-tools-how-to-host-a-successful-heart-bomb-event



DOX THRASH
HOUSE

W.G. SCHWEIKER
BUILDING

GEN. JOHN F.
REYNOLDS SCHOOL

ROBERTS VAUX
JUNIOR HIGH
SCHOOL



STEERING CLEAR OF DEMOLITION

THE THREAT OF DEMOLITION IS NOT always the death knell for old buildings. All of these sites were threatened at some point with long-term vacancy and/or imminent demolition. However, thanks to vocal community advocates, enthusiastic community organizations, proactive city officials, and/or sympathetic property owners, they remain standing today.

Ridge Avenue Demolition Moratorium

Roxborough - Ridge Avenue between Wissahickon Creek and Northwestern Avenue

Concerned about the pace of demolition along their primary commercial corridor, residents in Roxborough pushed their councilperson, Councilman Curtis Jones, Jr., to introduce a bill for a temporary demolition moratorium for Ridge Avenue. The bill, which went into effect in 2018, put a temporary halt to demolition for a five-mile stretch of the avenue, buying time for the identification and potential designation of significant properties that may be threatened. Thanks in part to this demolition delay, the Ridge Avenue Thematic Historic District was listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in October 2018. It includes 188 significant contributing properties along Ridge Avenue, extending from Wissahickon Creek to Northwest Avenue.

Nugent Home for Baptists

Germantown - 221 W. Johnson Street

After several starts and stops, and more than a decade of vacancy, this large chateau-like building (and its neighbor) was converted to affordable senior housing. A passionate developer spearheaded the project with broad support from neighbors. The project was financed in part with historic rehabilitation tax credits and low-income housing tax credits.

Lancaster Mews

Powelton Village - 3600-3630 Lancaster Avenue

Located in the heart of Powelton Village, this intact row of 19th century homes and storefronts faced imminent demolition for new construction. The local civic association (Powelton Village Civic Association) and Philadelphia Historical Commission staff moved quickly to designate the block as a historic district, saving the main structures of the row. The developer ultimately revised its plans to build at the rear of the properties, sacrificing some of the rear ends of the buildings but retaining the primary structures that give Lancaster Avenue its character.

Lower Dublin Academy

Holmesburg - 3322 Willits Road

The school dates back to 1808 and is located on land granted to Thomas Holme by William Penn. In 2006, an arson fire gutted the building and left it vacant and threatened with demolition. With enthusiastic community activism, though, the property was eventually purchased by the Albanian American Social-Cultural Organization, which plans to restore the site as an educational and cultural center.

Fifth Reformed Dutch Church

Fishtown - 2345 E. Susquehanna Avenue

The building that once housed the Fifth Reformed Dutch Church is located amid the booming real estate market of Fishtown, where several older houses of worship have faced the wrecking ball in recent years. This church met a better fate, though, when a new owner stepped in at the last minute to purchase the building and convert it to a live/work space. The project depended on a zoning variance for the change in use, which meant that the local registered community organization (RCO) needed to sign off. When the owner demonstrated a willingness to address the RCO's concerns, the committee voted in support of the project.

Diamond Street Historic District

North Philadelphia - Diamond Street from Broad Street to Van Pelt Street

Diamond Street is one of the most intact "grand avenues" of Victorian rowhouses, located in North Philadelphia. The district was designated in 1986, thanks in part to the advocacy of a local community organization (Advocate Community Development Corporation). With the rise in student housing and new construction around Temple University, the historic district designation staves off the loss of character in the neighborhood. Now, many of the Victorian homes have been rehabilitated and converted to apartments.

Chinese Cultural and Community Center

Chinatown - 125 N. 10th Street

When this building in the heart of Chinatown sat vacant for several years, neighbors worried that a local landmark would deteriorate past the point of saving. But advocates from the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) enlisted a sympathetic developer to become a state-appointed conservator of the building using Pennsylvania's Act 135, the Abandoned and Blighted Property Conservatorship Act. With court supervision, the property was rehabilitated and listed for sale, and in May 2018 it was purchased by a new owner, bringing it back to life in Chinatown.