HISTORIC PRESERVATION CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROJECT
Presenters

**Project Manager**
Molly Lester
Research Associate, PennPraxis

**Community Liaison**
Venise Whitaker
Citizen Planner, Fishtown +
Constituent Service Representative, Office of Council President Darrell L. Clarke

**City Liaison**
Laura Spina
Director of Community Planning, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
PROJECT BACKGROUND

PROJECT GOALS

PROCESS

TOOLKIT FORMAT

TOOLKIT DESIGN

DISTRIBUTION + USE

BEST PRACTICES
PROJECT BACKGROUND
NEED FOR THIS PROJECT

• **Complement** the work of the Mayor’s Task Force on Historic Preservation

• **Develop new resources** for neighborhoods and communities

• **Build greater understanding and inclusivity** in decision-making related to our historic resources and communities
Philadelphia 2035: Comprehensive Plan for Philadelphia

- Themes common to every district and neighborhood
- Preservation of existing building stock and fabric of the city
- Recommendations for the Philadelphia Historical Commission and designation
Historic Preservation Task Force

- Need for outreach
- Disconnect between the desire for preservation and regulations
- Constituency for preservation
PennPraxis is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that enables faculty and student collaboration at PennDesign.

We support design action and thought leadership to advance inclusion, innovation and impact in communities that design doesn’t typically serve.

Our work demonstrates the power of interdisciplinary design, art, planning, and heritage preservation to respond to the major challenges of the built and natural environments, and the communities that inhabit them.
PROJECT GOALS
This was a preservation project for people who are not preservationists.
A series of community-driven gatherings to discuss:

• “What places in your neighborhood matter to you and why?”
• “What does historic preservation mean to you? How does it currently function in your neighborhood”
• “How should history and development be balanced in your neighborhood?”
PROJECT OBJECTIVES

• Greater **understanding** and **inclusivity** in decision-making related to historic resources and communities

• Aligning preservation with **existing community values**

• New communication tools and themes for reaching a **broader audience** + **clearer mechanisms** for neighborhood-driven preservation
PROCESS:
Project partners
• Invite 8-12 neighbors to a candid conversation
• Participate in a toolkit design workshop with other liaisons
• Receive a stipend for their time
• **Coordinate** with the timeline of the Mayor’s Task Force
• **Respond** to the same issues under consideration by the Mayor’s Task Force
• **Inform** the decisions and priorities of the Mayor’s Task Force
• **Understand** what other advocates are doing
• **Position** our toolkit in relation to existing resources
• **Create** a resource that is useful for other partners and professionals
PROCESS:
Community Conversations
NEIGHBORHOODS:

Bella Vista
Chestnut Hill†
Chinatown
Germantown
East Parkside
East Point Breeze
Fishtown
Franklinville
Grays Ferry
Lower Moyamensing
Mt. Airy
Oxford Circle
Powelton Village
Parkwood
Rittenhouse Square
Roxborough
Spruce Hill
Strawberry Mansion
Tacony
Tioga/Nicetown
Kingsessing*
QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

• What places in this neighborhood matter to you, and why?
• What is “historic preservation”?  
  • From your perspective how does it function in this neighborhood, and how does it impact your life?  
  • What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of historic preservation?  
  • What do you wish you knew about historic preservation?  
• How should history and development be balanced in this neighborhood? What is your ideal vision for this neighborhood in the next 20 years?  
• What incentives would make preservation most relevant to you and this neighborhood?  
• How/where do you think people in this neighborhood get their community information?
WHO PARTICIPATED?

- 148 citizens representing over half of Philadelphia zip codes
- 64% involved with their CDC, RCO, or RA
- 47% describe themselves as “involved or formally educated in preservation, planning, or related field”
- 60% reported race/ethnicity as “White”; 27% “Black/African American”; and <10% “Latinx,” “Asian,” or “Other”
- 64% of subjects over age 50, median subject age category 50-64
PROCESS:
Analysis
Historic fabric contributes to the sense of place. Need for sense of place/distinct neighborhood destinations.

Need to use preservation as a way to prevent displacement and keep people in their homes (including aging in place).

Many ways to honor history without designation – e.g. plaques, “stars,” benches. Designation is not the only way to tell those stories.

Preservation applies to other neighborhoods, not mine.

Preservation is a low priority in this neighborhood. Other concerns take precedence.

Preservation leads to gentrification.

The city has never put sufficient funding and support behind preservation (even though the Amazon bid, etc. demonstrate that resources can be found). This sets the tone for the community.
### Recurring Themes by Neighborhood: Values

Refine incentives (e.g. tax abatement) to help homeowners and commercial property owners offset costs of maintenance/upkeep.

Refine incentives (e.g. tax abatement) to reward rehab/adaptive reuse more than demolition/new construction.

Refine incentives to keep commercial uses thriving/support small businesses. (Prevent neighborhoods with 100% residential frontage.)

Poor quality/design standards of new construction (replacement and infill) ruin goodwill toward new development. How can new construction that suits scale and architectural character of neighborhoods be encouraged?

Designation is currently seen as a pure negative: only enforcement (sticks), with no financial incentive (carrots). How can we balance enforcement with incentives to make designation more appealing?
Tiered approach for preservation has wide support – e.g. conservation districts

Development focused in specific areas is widely supported, but no confidence that guidelines will be respected and take pressure off of protected areas

Relaxed expectations in historic district designation, could be a more appealing option than individual designation: achieves oversight on a broader scale, and a sense of “tide lifts all boats”
### Recurring Themes by Neighborhood: Policy

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- Refine incentives to keep **commercial uses thriving/support small businesses**. (Prevent neighborhoods with 100% residential frontage.)

- **Poor quality/design standards of new construction** (replacement and infill) ruin goodwill toward new development. How can new construction that suits scale and architectural character of neighborhoods be encouraged?

- **Designation is currently seen as a pure negative**: only enforcement (sticks), with no financial incentive (carrots). How can we balance enforcement with incentives to make designation more appealing?
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RECURRING THEMES: PROCESS

• **Individuals are overwhelmed** with how to get involved and navigate agencies/systems and time/language proficiency required

• **Mistrust of governmental officials** at every level (council, state reps, staff) deters involvement in city processes

• Interest in **neighborhood-specific contact person** at agencies like PHC, as a consistent point of entry

• **Zoning variances** (and the perceived ease with which developers get variances) make it seem pointless to rezone and/or advocate for existing zoning

• **Absentee property owners/demolition by neglect** is allowed to happen with little to no enforcement
Enforcement is not universally applied, and illegal actions (e.g. demolition, work without permits) have little or no consequence.

SLAPP lawsuits are squelching advocacy by neighborhood organizations.

Length of time for review of proposed districts/resources is a deterrent.

Need to show and promote the preservation “wins” to encourage neighborhood advocates to keep trying.
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“We need someone with expertise to **tell us what’s important here**.”

There are significant gaps between the interests of renters and homeowners in neighborhood preservation. How can advocacy and outreach bridge the gap?

**Desire to tell neighborhood histories**/how can this be coupled with community ownership/valuing the history of those living there?

Neighborhood history should be included in **youth education** as ways to increase youth participation and appreciation. Integrate into school curriculum?

Need/appreciation for **neighborhood outreach/engagement** so ideas can come from residents. Work of this project very appreciated!
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*Note: The table reflects the presence or absence of specific themes in each neighborhood. Symbols indicate the level of agreement or engagement with the themes.
## PRELIMINARY CONTENT OUTLINE

### PURPOSE, AUDIENCE & CONTENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preserve my Own Home</td>
<td></td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve and Maintain Neighborhood Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honor Neighborhood History</td>
<td></td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen and Support Small Businesses</td>
<td></td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit Neighborhood Advocates</td>
<td></td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Activities

- Myth Busters / FAQs
- Glossary
- Preservation Staff and Advocacy Directory

- Wall Poster
- Brochure
• Test out one of the activities
• Tell us what you think of this format
• Would you find this useful to use at a community meeting or gathering?
• Where should this information be distributed and/or available?
Typeface avoids formality + traditionalism

Printed with just one color, to support at-home printing

Word choices are intentional

Symbols hint at sections within

Graphics and photos make sure to represent different eras / neighborhoods
I want to...

1. Care for an older home (PAGE 10)
2. Improve and maintain the design quality and character (PAGE 26)
3. Strengthen and sustain small businesses & commercial corridors (PAGE 46)
4. Learn and share the history (PAGE 60)
5. Create change and influence policy (PAGE 74)

...in my neighborhood.

Check out the "Who's Who" section (PAGE 90) & Glossary, too (PAGE 100).

Within each section, this toolkit offers...

- Some background on the topic. For example, if you’re not sure what we mean when we say "commercial corridor," the intro to that perspective will help you out.
- An ask and answer section of frequently asked questions and/or common misconceptions
- An activity to try it out, either as an individual or with a few friends or neighbors. For example, you could use a "Try It Out" activity at a community meeting to learn more from each other about what local places matter and why. The conversations inspired by these activities may inform your efforts to take action.
- Some "take action" steps that you and your community can work on together.
- Resources to learn more, including both print and web publications related to each perspective.
- Stories of preservation wins that demonstrate where these strategies have worked in Philadelphia

Even if you find yourself drawn to one perspective in particular, it is worth exploring all five (and the extra resources at the back of this guide) because they overlap and complement each other. After all, you may be interested in both caring for your older home and learning more about your neighborhood’s history.

Although the website links in this toolkit are up to date as of summer 2020, we recognize that the internet is always changing, and these links may not work down the road. In that case, we suggest a simple web search for the title and publisher of the resource.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Throughout the toolkit, certain areas will be highlighted as particularly useful for all neighbors that have interest in working to maintain their home, block, street, or neighborhood. Or perhaps you don’t know yet! This guide will help you figure out the right path.

Look for these badges throughout this toolkit for ideas and resources that may be of particular interest to different community members.

HOMEOWNER
DEVELOPER
BUSINESS OWNER
RENTER
YOUTH
I want to learn and share the history of my neighborhood.

BACKGROUND

Every neighborhood has a history. It may not seem like it if your community was built more recently—even in the last 50 years—but the wonderful thing about history is that it gets embedded in everything. There are many stories to tell about every place, old or new(ish), different perspectives to each story, and various ways to share these stories. If you believe that we can learn a lot from how we tell our history, and what it means to have inherited a place, then this section of the toolkit will help to identify different ways to learn and share your neighborhood’s history.

One definitive way to preserve history is to designate a building (or buildings) as historic—nominating them to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and/or the National Register of Historic Places. This toolkit includes information about that approach (see pages 12-13) and what it means for building owners and community members. But designation is not the only way to reveal and share a neighborhood’s history (or, more accurately, histories), and this section explores additional ways to do so, bridging ages and audiences alike.
I'm already involved. How do I recruit more advocates?

Finding more allies to support neighborhood issues may be as simple as raising 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, or speaking with a group of friends or family 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 single phone call 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 of all ages, and the advice about how to get things done in your own neighborhood.

Citizens Toolkit

citizensplanning.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 city councilperson, ward leader, council president, and the council that you live in. For example, your US Senator and Representative. Philadelphia includes three state congressional districts (the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd 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

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 what 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.
TRY IT OUT

How much do you know about your house’s history?

A house built in the mid-nineteenth century is often constructed differently than one built in the mid-twentieth century: different materials, different style, different construction methods, etc.—all of which can affect what you would find if you opened up the walls and floors of the house, and how you can repair it in a way that helps, not hurts, the building. If the house has been altered since its original construction—for instance, if vinyl siding has been added or stucco has been applied—it is important to understand how and when these changes were made, not simply as anecdotes, but in order to understand the ways that these alterations may be affecting the structure and character of your house.

Compiling a simple house history can also help you learn from the other houses on your block or in your neighborhood, as you compare and contrast house histories. For instance, if your house was built in the mid-nineteenth century by the same builder who constructed all of the houses on your block, what can you learn from other homeowners or renters about the structural issues that they’ve encountered, and how they’ve fixed them? Or, as another example, if you all share similar tiled foyers that are distinctive to your area, what can you learn from each other about the artisans who designed those tiles? Can you compare notes about the best ways to repair those foyers?
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
philacouncil.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
public.gov.philplanning/projectreviewsPages/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 we all live in.

Be a public correspondent for your community
Attend the public meetings and/or join the listserv 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.
NORTH 5TH STREET REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Located a few miles north of Center City is Philadelphia’s Olney neighborhood, one of the city’s most diverse, where old and new residents, housing types, and several distinct ethnicities overlap. The heart of Olney is the North 5th Street commercial corridor, which today is home to over 300 businesses, serving and representing people from all corners of the world.

This bustling corridor is supported and maintained through the work of the North 5th Street Revitalization Project (N5SRP), which was founded in 2007 as a project of the Korean Community Development Services Center (KCDSC), a longstanding community development organization working in the neighborhood since the 1980s.

The group, and Olney residents, know that a key ingredient in promoting economic stability and neighborhood cohesion was investing in the commercial corridor—which would serve as a gathering hub and build a sense of community pride for surrounding residents. The following year, in 2008, N5SRP began receiving funding from the Philadelphia Commerce Department and since then, it has continued to grow and expand its services, always working in tandem with the community. Acting as a convener and facilitator, N5SRP revived the old Olney Business Association. The group has also worked to create new businesses and work with existing ones to share resources, de-mystify application processes, and organize events such as corridor clean-ups and festivals. They have helped leverage small business loans and façade improvement grants for small businesses, which is a great help for small businesses that may find these processes cumbersome or overwhelming. N5SRP has also contributed greatly to neighborhood beautification, including overseeing the installation of murals, benches, and street trees. As a part of KCDSC, the organization is also linked to complementary programs for housing services, educational programs, and immigration/citizen services, which provide wrap-around support for the community as a whole. North 5th Street is now seen as a citywide attraction for events, known for its multitude of food choices, and as a place where neighborhood residents, local businesses, and occasional visitors are given a warm welcome and an environment that is a direct reflection of the community’s hard work and input.
For information about Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

You can read more about BIDs in the guide published by the City of Philadelphia Department of Commerce and Drexel University's Center for Public Policy. The page is entitled "Starting a Business Improvement District In Philadelphia" and is available below:

Business Improvement Districts
businessphiladelphia.org/starting-a-bid-in-philadelphia.pdf

For information about policies that affect local commercial corridors

PACDC released the Commercial Corridor Policy Agenda in 2017. This report resulted from a convening of 40 commercial corridor managers and community development corporations, and it calls upon City Council and the mayor to boost investments in programs that add commercial corridors and small businesses.

Commercial Corridor Policy Agenda in 2017

For information about state and federal rehabilitation tax credits

Program info for the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program is available on the Department of Community and Economic Development website. Program info for the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (Historic Tax Credit) is available on the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website below:

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development: Rehab Tax Credit
rehabtaxcredit.dced.pa.gov/program-decisions-philadelphia-tax-credit.php

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission: Rehab Tax Credit
rehabtaxcredit.dced.pa.gov/program-decisions-historic-tax-credit.php

For commercial property owners

If you're looking to start or sustain a small business located in a rowhouse, then the Philadelphia Rowhouse Manual (2003, National Trust for Historic Preservation/Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development/Philadelphia City Planning Commission) is a great place to start. This practical guide can help you learn more about the building's architecture and learn the basics of investor and tenant care and maintenance. The manual is available online.

The Philadelphia Rowhouse Manual

For technical assistance on maintenance of older commercial buildings

The National Park Service has published 50 Technical Preservation Briefs to provide guidance on preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring older buildings—offering guidance on everything from repairing mortar joints to improving energy efficiency to repairing historic wood windows. The briefs are free and are available online.

National Park Service Preservation Briefs
gov/parks/heritage/preservationbriefs.htm

For community advocates to learn from each other

The Local Preservation School is an online "open learning environment" where preservation advocates and volunteers share with people how to save and sustain historic places in their communities.

The Local Preservation School
preservation.columbia.edu
I want to...

- Care for an older home
- Improve and maintain the design quality and character
- Strengthen and sustain small businesses & commercial corridors
- Learn and share the history
- Create change and influence policy

...in my neighborhood.

If any of these goals apply to you, learn more about taking a role in neighborhood preservation by visiting phlpreservation.org

(English)

我想...

- 保护我社区中的一幢老房子
- 改善和保持我社区中的设计质量和特点
- 强化和保持我社区中的小规模经营和商业廊道
- 学习并分享我的社区的历史
- 构思改变和影响我的社区的政策

...在我的社区内。

如果这些目标适用于您，了解有关在社区保护中发挥角色的更多信息，请访问 phlpreservation.org

(Chinese)

Yo quiero...

- Cuidar una casa antigua
- Mejorar y mantener la calidad del diseño y carácter
- Fortalecer y soportar los negocios pequeños y corredores comerciales
- Aprender y compartir la historia
- Crear cambio e influir en la política

...en mi vecindario.

Si cualquiera de estos objetivos te aplican, aprende más sobre tomar un rol en la preservación de vecindarios visitando phlpreservation.org

(Spanish)
DISTRIBUTION + USE
DISTRIBUTED TO...

- Community liaisons
- Library branches
- Neighborhood-based advocacy organizations
- City-wide advocacy organizations
- City Council representatives
- City departments
- Task Force members
• **Helps frame the conversation** with communities around preservation

• Demonstrates that **preservation takes many forms**

• **Provides a useful tool** for communities to lead the discussion
BEST
PRACTICES
start with the community.
pay liaisons for their time.
work in partnership.
don’t pre-determine the final product.
build in the time to reflect.
build in the time to revise.
QUESTIONS + DISCUSSION

Download the Toolkit at either:
www.PHLpreservation.org (under “Resources”)  
www.design.upenn.edu/pennpraxis