



GREEN CITY STRATEGY FOR PHILADELPHIA

ISSUE BRIEF

Urban Greening Contributes to Economic Growth and Safer Neighborhoods

The 2007 Mayoral Race is taking place at a time when Philadelphians are poised to embrace growth. They are proud to be recognized as America's "next great city," according to *National Geographic Traveller* magazine. They also know that a lot has to be done to realize this potential.

Sustainable economic growth is essential, and many of the city's nonprofit organizations are committed to implementing "greening" programs and initiatives that are contributing mightily to Philadelphia's progress. It is critical for the next mayor to leverage the investments made in these programs and support their continued success.

- A greener city is a stronger city, one better able to attract and retain jobs and people;
- Urban green spaces offer important aesthetic, economic, environmental and social benefits.

Over the last three decades, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) Philadelphia Green program has served as both a catalyst and an advocate for quality open space, creating innovative ways to bring people, plants and places together. In partnership with government, residents and local organizations, Philadelphia Green has created a Green City Strategy that links greening to community redevelopment, – improving our streetscapes, and creating a vibrant environment for new businesses and housing.

PHS will continue to utilize its strong track record and extensive network of members, community residents, and partner nonprofits and businesses to garner support for this bold Strategy: a vision for the greening of Philadelphia as a means to improve the quality of life, reduce crime and strengthen Philadelphia's neighborhoods.

The Green City Strategy is built upon PHS's extensive experience in urban greening. It calls for significant improvements to the city's open spaces as a means to stem population loss and attract new residents and investment.

Some of these improvements include:

- Revitalizing municipal parks and public spaces
- Landscaping community gateways and key corridors
- Tree plantings
- "Cleaning and Greening" vacant lots
- Comprehensive planning for quality open space
- Education, training and volunteer management

IMPORTANT FACTS

Greening contributes to rising property values, which in turn contribute to the city's economic growth, according to research provided by The Wharton School's study, *Public Investment Strategies: How They Matter for Neighborhoods in Philadelphia*.

Property Values Increase by:

- **9% with new tree plantings**
- **28% with improvements to streetscapes**
- **30% if they are located adjacent to cleaned and greened lots**

Additional studies (conducted by the University of Washington) show that,

- **Landscaping adds to the dollar value and sales appeal of commercial real estate and boosts office occupancy rates**

Greening strategies can help reduce violence in our neighborhoods.

Criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling warn of the "broken window" theory. Left unmanaged, one vacant lot can lead to the perception of neighborhood abandonment, increasing crime and housing neglect.

Studies by the University of Illinois conclude,

- **Exposure to trees and nature can help reduce school violence and improve classroom concentration**

USDA researchers in Davis, California found,

- **Greening can change people's perceptions of their neighborhoods, reduce violence and crime, and increase neighborhood stability**

PHILADELPHIA'S GREEN CITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

BUILD ON THE MOMENTUM

Invest in Plans and Policies that Support Urban Revitalization through Greening

- **Implement GreenPlan Philadelphia, a comprehensive open space plan for the city.** Philadelphia, one of the only major cities in the country currently without a comprehensive plan for managing and supporting open space, is in the process of completing its first-ever open space plan by fall, 2007.

Support this important step toward a Green Philadelphia by providing vision and leadership.

- **Manage vacant land as a significantly valuable asset.** More than 40,000 derelict lots plague Philadelphia's neighborhoods. Simple immediate steps such as removing debris and planting grass and trees have improved property values and stopped population loss and reduced crime while attracting new businesses, private investments, and residents. Over the past six years, nearly 5 million square feet of land has been "cleaned and greened." The City of Philadelphia has invested nearly \$12 million through the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative in vacant land management, the planting of trees, and the cleaning up of more than 5,500 trash-filled lots.

Leverage the public and private investments made to date by continuing the stabilization of derelict land and streamlining the acquisition and disposition process to facilitate redevelopment.

- **Support development and preservation of community-managed green spaces.** Community gardens, mini parks and the smaller open spaces that are used and maintained by neighborhood volunteers are a significant benefit to the city's landscape. Most importantly, the neighborhood residents involved in these activities become the local eyes and ears of the community, fostering safety and security and enhancing the quality of life.

Implement policies to support and protect the long-term viability of these spaces.

- **Promote and invest in a localized approach to storm water management.** Thousands of residents throughout the city experience regular flooding in their communities due to an archaic combined sewer system. Overflow from this system results in polluted rivers and streams. Test sites throughout Philadelphia are proving that open spaces such as parks, streetscapes and clean and green lots can in some cases be retrofitted to receive storm water and help relieve localized flooding problems.

Leverage the expertise provided by PHS and the Water Department to implement best practices in storm water management.

- **Develop the city park system through leadership, partnership and resources.** Research consistently shows that investment in parks promotes economic revitalization, attracts new residents and makes cities more livable. Parks need vision, leadership, planning, resources, maintenance, and stewardship.

Endorse the recent recommendations (December, 06) of the Parks Reform Task Force, which call for reform in the selection of Commissioners and provide options for increased and diversified funding for parks.

- **Plant trees in the city's neighborhoods.** In the past two decades, Philadelphia has lost over 200,000 trees degrading urban neighborhoods and increasing heat and pollution in the city. The current tree planting and management system is underfunded, inadequate, and falls short of protecting and improving the city's "urban forest." A proactive new management system should partner with public and private organizations, businesses and community groups to sustain and expand Philadelphia's tree canopy.

Dedicate and leverage resources to establish and realize an ambitious tree planting goal.

- **Promote public and private investment in "civic" landscapes.** Investment in Center City's most treasured open spaces, gateways and vital streetscapes such as Logan Square, the Parkway, the Azalea Garden and the Avenue of the Arts positions Philadelphia as a "must-see" destination.

Leverage and expand investment in these key civic assets. Their continued viability will provide Philadelphia with an extraordinary return on investment and renown as a world-class city.