



# CENTER CITY: PLANNING FOR GROWTH

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN PARKWAY

*The proposals for enhancing the Benjamin Franklin Parkway have emerged from over five years of collaborative work with the Parkway Council Foundation, the Fairmount Park Commission, the Philadelphia Art Commission and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. In 2003, a new conceptual master plan was prepared by the Olin Partnership. Additional design and traffic engineering work was done by Brown & Keener Bressi, Cope Linder Architects, Lager Raabe Skafte Landscape Architects, Kise Straw & Kolodner, Urban Engineers, Cloud Gehshan Associates, The Lighting Practice and Grenald Waldron Associates. The advancement and implementation of these enhancements is anticipated soon.*

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Prepared by  
Center City District &  
Central Philadelphia Development Corporation  
May 2008 (Revised)

## KEY PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES

- Achieve a better balance between pedestrians and vehicles while improving access to cultural institutions.
- Design and program public spaces with exhibits and events sponsored by the cultural institutions to achieve a higher level of use and animation.
- Determine the appropriate level and location for new developments and provide for the management of open spaces.
- Expand the collaborative effort by Parkway institutions to better manage and market the Parkway as a place.
- Address parking and transportation issues. On an enhanced cultural campus, visitors to the Parkway should be able to arrive by public transportation or have to park only once.

The Benjamin Franklin Parkway is a 1.1 mile-long, diagonal boulevard reaching from City Hall to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and offering broad, inspiring vistas, extraordinary fountains and public sculpture. Framed by an ensemble of monumental buildings, it is the setting for some of the region's foremost educational and cultural institutions that draw almost three million visitors each year. Students of all ages can learn about archeology, astronomy, biology, ecology and technology. Local residents, office workers and tourists can appreciate fine art, fine dining and luxury hotels with extraordinary views.

In recent years, Parkway institutions have been improving their facilities, upgrading exhibits, expanding their offerings and hosting blockbuster shows. The Franklin Institute and Moore College of Art & Design have completed major renovations. The expansion of the nearby Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts has more than doubled the offering of fine American art. The United Way is developing new ways to engage the public on the Parkway. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) opened its new Perelman Building in 2007. It is also building a new garage and sculpture garden and has announced plans for expanded underground galleries. With design underway for the relocation of the Barnes Foundation near the PMA and adjacent to the Rodin Museum, the Parkway will soon host one of the most extraordinary collections of 19th- and 20th-century French art. The Free Library is fundraising for a significant expansion. New residential development is capitalizing on proximity to the Parkway. With the Convention Center expanding, there is also the potential for new hotels.

### An uncompleted place

Nevertheless, the Parkway still feels too much like a highway that is crowded at rush hour, but devoid of people and activity throughout the rest of the day and evening. Unsafe pedestrian crossings, high-speed traffic and large empty distances isolate cultural institutions, discourage casual strolling and impulse visits and constrain the Parkway from realizing its full educational and economic potential.



(1) The Benjamin Franklin Parkway in the 1940s, before the Vine Street Expressway cut through Logan Square.

Many of these challenges derive from the Parkway's failure to finish its founding vision. The idea for the Benjamin Franklin Parkway was first proposed in the 1870s as a diagonal linking Philadelphia's new City Hall with the recently created Fairmount Park. From the 1890s, as the concept for a Fairmount parkway gained broad civic, business and political support, drawings portray a narrow and denser, Parisian-style boulevard lined with commercial, residential and civic buildings. Finally constructed in the first two decades of the 20th century, the Parkway was strongly influenced by the "City Beautiful" movement, inspired by the Chicago Exposition of 1893. Renderings done in 1907 by Paul Cret at the start of construction show a wider boulevard lined with closely spaced, classically inspired civic and cultural institutions to replace the 1,300 properties that were being demolished.

Jacques Greber's final plans, drawn as roadway construction was nearing completion in 1917, envision a less-dense parkway as an extension of Fairmount Park into the city with long rows of trees, landscaped gardens and numerous fountains. With the automobile in its infancy, drawings also depict a gracious thoroughfare where strolling pedestrians,

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**(2)** In 1884, Charles K. Landis first drew a new diagonal boulevard. **(3)** The 1892 James H. Windrim plan envisions a dense Parisian-style boulevard. **(4)** This 1911 model was deeply influenced by the City Beautiful movement. **(5)** Horace Trumbauer portrayed pedestrians and cars sharing the roadway on the Parkway. **(6)** By the 1940s, the roadway had become overloaded with cars.



7

Tom Crane

horse-drawn and horseless carriages comfortably co-exist in a verdant setting that offers respite from a dense, industrial city. But even these plans show far more cultural and educational institutions that were ever constructed.

The first new building on the Parkway, the Free Library of Philadelphia, was completed in 1927 and was followed the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Rodin Museum, the Franklin Institute and the Family Court. But the Depression put an end to new developments, leaving the Parkway with half as many institutional buildings as were originally planned.

But as early as the 1920s, as the volume and velocity of gas-powered vehicles rose exponentially, the Parkway took on the character of a landscaped highway. Traffic lights were first installed in 1933 and intersections were soon tapered to expedite traffic flow. Throughout the 1940s, no new buildings appeared on the Parkway and plans for more museums, an art school, a concert hall and numerous fountains were slowly forgotten.

Projects conceived in the 1950s, like the Youth Study Center and Park Towne Place, did not orient themselves towards the Parkway nor engage its public spaces. Instead, they set back from the roadway, suburban-style. In the 1960s, to reduce traffic jams, the depressed Vine Street Expressway was sliced through the Parkway, disconnecting



8

Cloud Gehshan Associates

(7-8) Through lighting, signs and information panels, the CCD has been adding pedestrian amenities to the Parkway.

institutions from Logan Square, while Eakin's Oval was converted to a traffic circle to accommodate traffic pouring off the Schuylkill Expressway. Today, with 12 lanes of roadway west of Logan Square, the Parkway serves as a busy rush hour route to and from Northwest Philadelphia and the western suburbs. But during the rest of the day and on weekends, it is usually devoid of people and activity.

**Rethinking the Parkway**

In 2002 the William Penn Foundation funded Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC) to work in partnership with Parkway institutions, the Parkway Council Foundation, the Fairmount Park Commission, other city agencies and civic associations to develop a new framework for animation and growth.

In early 2003 CPDC hosted a design charrette to answer a fundamental question: What type of place do we want to create? Looking back at early plans for the Parkway and learning from models as diverse as the Champs Elysées in Paris, the Passeig de Gràcia in Barcelona, Forest Park in St. Louis, Balboa Park in San Diego, Commonwealth Avenue in Boston and Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, a consensus emerged that the Parkway should advance as an animated cultural campus. Though carrying high volumes of cars, all parties agreed that the Parkway must become less a highway and more of a place. As the setting for major cultural, edu-

# BENJAMIN FRANKLIN PARKWAY



Cope Linder Architects

9



Olin Partnership

10



Moshe Safdie

11



DVRPC 2005 Aerial Imagery

12

(9) Cafes, like this one under construction near 3 Parkway, and bookstalls can animate the spaces in front of the Free Library and Family Court buildings. New fountains, exactly where they were proposed in Greber’s original plan, can create additional attractions and further muffle the sound of cars. (10) Improvements to all the components of Logan Square will create a more pedestrian-friendly and active place. (11) The expansion of the Free Library by Moshe Safdie creates a great new public room and gathering space. (12) The Youth Study Center on the 2000 block will be replaced by a new home for the Barnes Foundation, designed by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects.

cational and civic institutions, the Parkway requires unifying, high-quality, well-maintained public spaces. But as the University of Pennsylvania has demonstrated in the last two decades, a vibrant campus contains not only trees and gardens, but restaurants, cafes and a diversity of uses that animate public spaces with strolling pedestrians both day and night.

To begin the process of reactivating public spaces, in 2003 the Center City District — with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania — installed hundreds of new pedestrian and vehicular lights, illuminated 12 major monuments and sculptures, and dramatically lit the facades of nine civic buildings from City Hall to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

With support from the William Penn Foundation, new crosswalks were installed along the Parkway’s diagonal in 2004, enabling easy access to Swann Fountain in Logan Square. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, restored the landscaping around Swann Fountain in 2006.

In 2007, the CCD installed new interpretive, directional and gateway signs along the Parkway and, with support from the federal government, transformed Aviator Park in front of the Franklin Institute into an open, green and family-friendly oasis. The CCD is currently building a new café and information pavilion on the Parkway, between 16th & 17th streets, set to open later in 2008. And CCD has completed conceptual designs for improvements to two more public open spaces along the Parkway: Shakespeare Park, in front of the Free Library of Philadelphia, and Sister Cities Park, in front of the Cathedral Basilica of Ss. Peter and Paul. Funding to support construction documentation and implementation of this work is anticipated soon.

These improvements are guided by four broad objectives:

**Goal #1: Achieve a better balance between pedestrians and vehicles while improving access to cultural institutions.**

Just as pedestrian access was improved to Swann Fountain, all the crosswalks that connect to the green spaces of Logan Square should be enhanced and each of the park areas fully

restored. Until such time as the expressway can be covered at Logan Square, attractive, landscaped sound barriers should quiet the roar from the highway below.

Traffic counts suggest that the Parkway west of Logan Square has more lanes of asphalt than are required. Widening sidewalks to create dedicated lanes for bicyclists, roller-bladers and walkers can calm traffic and restore the primacy of pedestrians on the outer edges closer to the cultural institutions. High-speed traffic should be concentrated in the center lanes between Logan Square and Eakin's Oval. Outer lanes should be reduced from three to two and traffic slowed by allowing parking in off-peak hours.

Restoring Eakin's Oval to its original configuration would allow pedestrians to cross safely and legally from the Washington Monument to the steps of the Art Museum. This substantial change would repay the investment by creating two new, four-acre parcels and a place for underground parking.

**Goal #2: Design and program public spaces with exhibits and events sponsored by the cultural institutions to achieve a higher level of use and animation.**

Significant gaps in amenities and activity render much of the Parkway lifeless and inhospitable to pedestrians. As institutions bring art, sculpture and events outside, the Parkway will provide a constantly engaging experience with a variety of small-scale, street-related activities — cafes, bookstalls, children's play areas, information and ticket booths, interpretative panels, programmed or impromptu performances. The activities and attractions can be spaced so the next one is never more than a minute's walk away. Construction of the new Barnes Foundation on the site of the Youth Study Center offers an opportunity to activate the 2000 block of the Parkway with a street-fronting café included in the design of the new building.

**Goal #3: Determine the appropriate level and location for new developments and provide for the management of open spaces.**

The site that had been proposed for the Calder Museum on the south side of the 2100 block of the Parkway can one day accommodate another cultural institution, as could the blocks to the west in front of Park Towne Place. The edges of the existing playing fields and the front doors of all cultural institutions can be activated by new amenities and activities. Newly created parcels at Eakin's Oval could be programmed with public gardens, sculptures, and outdoor cafes. If the Family Court relocates from Logan Square, its existing building could be converted to a new cultural use, a hotel or residential development.

The Parkway is one of the few main streets in Philadelphia that was planned as a whole and important design precepts have been firmly established. For example, similar setbacks, materials and cornice lines should reinforce continuity even



**(13)** The Olin Partnership envisions a portion of the Barnes Foundation directly engaging the sidewalk on the Parkway.

if the architecture is distinctly modern. While respecting view corridors, all buildings should engage and activate the street and new opportunities should be explored for residential development.

Building on the work of the Parkway Council Foundation, a single, well-funded management entity for the Parkway should ensure quality development in the future, while also assuming responsibility for public space management, maintenance, events production, marketing and promotion. The city and Fairmount Park Commission should work to reduce the number of large-scale events that actually prevent visits to institutions, even as they overwhelm the Parkway with crowds, barricades and portable toilets and fill adjacent neighborhoods with illegally parked cars.

**Goal #4: Address parking and transportation issues. On an enhanced cultural campus, visitors to the Parkway should have to park only once.**

New parking facilities should serve multiple institutions to encourage walking and should be built underground or behind new buildings to preserve view corridors. The Parkway is underserved by public transit. The seasonal Phlash shuttles visitors among Parkway institutions, the Independence Visitor Center and other downtown stops. Better year-round service is needed along the Parkway to serve visitors and residents.

A century after the start of demolition in 1907 and nearly 70 years since the last civic building was completed, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway is poised for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-emerge as an animated, walkable cultural campus that will be one of Philadelphia's great destinations.



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