

CENTER CITY DIGEST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER CITY DISTRICT AND CENTRAL PHILADELPHIA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

SUMMER 2008

Thinking About Next Steps

When the Center City District was formed in 1990, the economy was in recession, the City in fiscal crisis, and downtown was dirty and dangerous. The deployment of uniformed CCD personnel had a dramatic effect on both the appearance and psychology of Center City. Problems *were* solvable; pessimism need not prevail.

But though Center City was *clean* and *safe*, that didn't make it competitive. Years of rising taxes, bloated municipal contracts, and impenetrable bureaucracies had driven away people and commerce. With leverage from a financial oversight board, Mayor Rendell reversed the downward spiral, setting a new course with tax reduction and business-friendliness.

Rendell brought charisma, capital, and obstacle clearance. People want to believe in Philadelphia and his leadership helped convert interest into investment. Major capital infusions in the Avenue of the Arts

and Convention Center diversified downtown, leveraging development of restaurants, retail, and hotels.

Just *getting out of the way* accomplished much. Removing prohibitions on outdoor cafes in 1995 sparked growth from zero to 215 in 13 years. The 1997 ten-year tax abatement compensated for high labor costs and low values, prompting 11,000 new housing units in 11 years, a burgeoning downtown population, and a baby boom that's swelling enrollment at public and independent schools.

In an era when jobs follow people as much as people follow jobs, the diversification of downtown fostered an attractive mix of walkable amenities. But here we are again-verging on national recession, with homelessness on the rise, while national stories of foreclosure and bank failure send clouds of pessimism into the air. How best to maintain momentum in this downward cycle while preparing for the next rebound?

Doing More of What We Do

No doubt, as Malcolm Gladwell notes in *The Tipping Point*, small, cumulative changes in the public environment alter perception and private behavior. So the CCD is costing out earlier starts and extended evening deployment for on-street crews, as well as more attractive landscaping, lighting, and new graphics at transit entrances. But this alone is not enough.

Responding to homelessness

No issue has attracted more concern than the surge in homeless in Center City, rising from an annual average of 171 in 2000 to a high of 621 last summer. Among major American cities, Philadelphia is quite generous, providing \$106 million per year for services and housing for 3,300 individuals without shelter on any given day and the 15,000 who experience episodes of homelessness over the course of a year.

More than 90% of homeless in Philadelphia eagerly accept help when offered. The 300 to 400 who congregate in alleys, streets and parks downtown are atypical. This "shelter-resistant" group suffers from drug and alcohol addiction, mental disorders, and an aversion to structure and other people's rules. Many use the street as their bathroom. Others commit petty crimes to support their habit.

When the City increases "low-demand" facilities for this troubled population, as Mayor Nutter recently did, many come in. But even the most dedicated outreach professional scores their success rate no higher than 30%. Former Inquirer reporter Steve Lopez's new book, *The Soloist*, captures well the extraordinary patience of outreach teams and the limits of force in prompting individuals to give up dangerous and unhealthy conditions on the street.

Any public response must be humane, patient, and comprehensive. (CCD's rec-



The close proximity of residential neighborhoods to the downtown core enables 40% of Center City residents to walk to work.

Keila Cordova for CCD

ommendations are online in the December 2006 Digest.) But ask yourself a few questions: Would you rent an apartment if homeless individuals were sleeping in the front door? Would you stay in a hotel with encampments in the lobby? How then does Philadelphia stay competitive if the front door to the city, the locale for 80% of prime office space, 70% of hotel rooms, 60% of fine dining

tional ways to regulate the time, place, and manner of anti-social behavior, by offering alternative locales to receive food, use public accommodations, and sleep.

Getting Out of the Way

The wage tax has been declining for a decade; it will drop another half point as the gaming impasse is resolved. Yet

democratic incentive. Every new employee pays wage tax, spends dollars in the city, and occupies taxable real estate. If we don't grow these private sector jobs, we can't fund public programs that support social inclusion.

Strategic Investments

With fuel costs rising, investments in transit – increased frequency, smart-cards and real-time information – can help us regain regional market share. Redevelopment on East Market, Dilworth plaza, and in the office district, west of 21st Street, to strengthen connections to University City, can have a greater impact on job growth than did the Avenue of the Arts. With investments in residential amenities — schools, parks and playgrounds — we can retain a larger portion of families with choice. We are a moment in the life of the city when much is possible. It's time to catch the wind that has propelled other cities on a course of growth.

Paul R. Levy
President

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We are in a moment in the life of the city when much is possible.

establishments, and the setting for 50% of all salaries earned by city residents is so challenged?

It is one thing to say we should be extraordinarily cautious about using public authority when the behavior of a few disrupts the livelihood of many. It is quite another to say we must tolerate in the primary center of commerce and opportunity behaviors we would not accept on our own street. No city can criminalize poverty or ban individuals just because they are unpleasant. But many cities find compassionate and constitu-

despite recent cuts made by Mayor Nutter and City Council, the business privilege tax remains a barrier in a city that has lost a quarter of its jobs in the last three decades.

What's the job-creation equivalent of the ten-year abatement? Privileging a few sites as tax-free may be necessary to attract major firms, but it is far from equitable. An expanded job-creation, business-privilege tax credit, available anywhere in Philadelphia to an existing, start-up, or in-moving firms that add jobs is a simple, powerful and more

Visit Our Revamped Web Site

www.CenterCityPhila.org

The Center City District and Central Philadelphia Development Corporation have launched a completely revised Web site. Designed by Center City-based Electronic Ink, the new site makes it easy to find information about both business and leisure downtown, as well as CCD and CPDC.

The site includes search functions for available office space, shopping and dining, and amenities for residents, as well as links to all recent CCD/CPDC research, reports, press releases, and improvement plans. Featured this summer is a computer animation of the proposed improvements to Dilworth Plaza.



Solar-Powered Trash Can Demonstration Project

The City of Philadelphia Streets Department and the Center City District are partnering in a demonstration project to test solar-powered trash receptacles in Center City. A trash compactor at 7th & Chestnut Street (right) is one of three cans installed as part of the test program. The other two are located on the 1400 and 1800 blocks of Walnut Street.

Brand-named BigBelly®, the receptacles are the world's only solar-powered cordless compaction system. Manufactured in the USA, the receptacle is made of galvanized steel and recyclable ABS plastic sides. It uses the sun's energy to automatically compact trash at the point of disposal, significantly increasing capacity by four times within the same footprint as ordinary receptacles. Increased capacity reduces overflow, the number of collection trips and can cut related fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions by 80%. It has the capacity to hold 200 gallons of trash (normal city trash cans hold 55 gallons) and can operate for a week on the energy it takes to make a pot of coffee. The enclosed design keeps pests out and litter in.

"We are pleased to work with the Streets Department on this trial run for the BigBelly® receptacles," said Paul R. Levy,

President & CEO for Center City District. "These cans look better and seem to work better than traditional trash cans so we are eager to test how well they perform in Philadelphia."

"We are pleased to be partnering with the Center City District in the use of this advanced technology and embrace ideas like this that can potentially save us money and natural resources," according to Clarena Tolson, Department of Streets Commissioner for the City of Philadelphia, noting that the solar-powered compactors are used in over 50 municipalities from Baltimore to Sacramento, as well as in parks, zoos and on campuses across the country.

Mark Alan Hughes, Philadelphia's Director of Sustainability and Senior Advisor to the Mayor added, "Innovative solutions that promote a green and clean city like BigBelly® are a small but critical piece of creating a more sustainable city and region. I look forward to working with the Streets Department and the Center City District to implement additional strategies for trash collection, recycling, and a clean environment.

The BigBelly® needs no direct sunlight. It runs on a 12-volt battery that is kept



BigBelly® solar-powered compactor, in front of the CCD offices at 7th and Chestnut Street.

charged by a solar panel on sunny or cloudy days. The demonstration period for the receptacles will last a month, during which time Center City District personnel will collect the compacted trash from the three receptacles as needed and track machine performance, operational impact and public perception.

CCD Tree Survey

Just how many street trees are there in Center City and what condition are they in? Those are questions the CCD will answer for the City's Fairmount Park Commission, which recently asked the CCD to conduct a tree survey from Spring Garden to South streets, river to river. Using hand-held personal computers, CCD staff will record the location, species, condition, diameter, and size of the shade canopy for all street trees within the public right-of-way. Working with Fairmount Park, CCD will help create the first digital tree database for downtown. "This information will be tremendously useful in helping the City assess its ability to reach tree canopy goals for Center City that are set forth in GreenPlan Philadelphia," said Robert

Allen, GreenPlan Philadelphia Project Manager. GreenPlan Philadelphia, the City's comprehensive open space plan, has set the goal of having 30% of the city shaded by trees. "The Nutter administration has provided an additional \$1 million to Fairmount Park to plant new trees throughout the city and the CCD's survey will help determine the maximum amount of new street trees possible for Center City," added Allen.

Trees not only provide an attractive amenity in business and residential areas, but they also increase property value, improve air quality, reduce flooding, and cool sidewalks during the hot summer months.

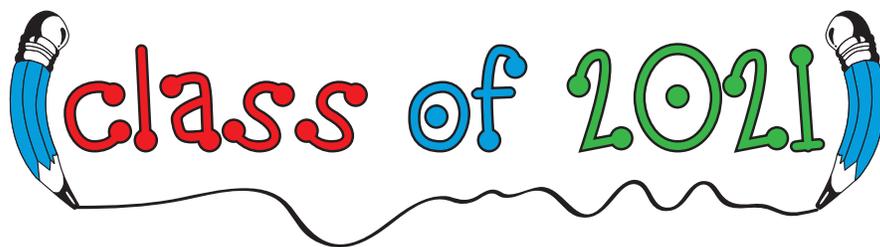


CCD will track trees such as these, at 10th and Walnut Street, for the Fairmount Park Commission.

Center City Schools Initiatives

As more young professionals with children choose to stay in Center City, the availability of quality schools has become an issue of growing importance. For more than three years, the Center City District has been working with the School District of Philadelphia and with independent, charter, and parochial schools to help them capitalize on this historic opportunity and to insure that parents are aware of the many choices they have to educate their children in a downtown that is rich with cultural amenities. The multi-year initiative has included advertising, events, and a website, www.CenterCitySchools.com, that provides direct links to all types of schools in Center City.

More than 12,000 children have been born to Center City parents since 2000 and this “baby boom” has caused a surge of enrollments at Center City’s three independent schools and in most pre-school programs downtown. During the past year, the CCD has partnered with the School District to encourage parents of prospective kindergarten children to register early at the four public schools



located in the core of the downtown. The communications campaign included ads in *Parents Express*, *the Weekly Press*, *Metro Kids* and neighborhood publications like the *Washington Square West Post*, *Society Hill Reporter*, etc. In addition, postcards were sent to pediatricians’ offices, day care centers, pre-schools, and a variety of community centers.

As a result of this communications campaign, registration for kindergarten at three of the Center City public elementary schools was impressive, with 70% of the September 2008 kindergarten classes at Meredith, McCall, and Greenfield coming from their immediate surrounding neighborhood.

Once registered, parents and new kindergartners were invited to “kindergarten socials,” where they had a chance to meet the teachers, principals and each other. The socials were held at Meredith, Greenfield, Bache-Martin and McCall schools and invitees were provided with snacks and useful information. Each family received a goody bag with coloring sheets, crayons, pencils and a t-shirt that reads “Class of 2021.”

The CCD has also made several upgrades to www.CenterCitySchools.com, adding “a list of pre-schools to the website map and a more user-friendly navigation system. Watch soon for a new list of family-oriented events.”

New Funding for Parkway

Building on a series of recent enhancements to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Governor Ed Rendell and Mayor Michael Nutter announced a jolt of new funding for the 1.1 mile boulevard, representing a major step toward transforming the Parkway into a dynamic cultural campus. The \$17.1 million funding package comes from a consortium of stakeholders, including the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the City of Philadelphia, the Pew Charitable Trusts, William Penn Foundation, and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and will be used to implement six significant projects. The CCD will manage two major capital projects, including renovations to the park in front of the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul and improvements to Shakespeare Park directly in front of the Free Library. Other projects, to be undertaken by the City and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, include realigning traffic lanes and curbs in the outer lanes of the 2100 and 2200

blocks of the Parkway, as well as creating bicycle lanes and widening sidewalks in those blocks; installing new granite curbs, concrete sidewalks with brick edging, new benches, trash can receptacles and landscaping on the 1600 and 1700 blocks; installing new trees on the 1800 block south of Logan Circle; and enhancing the landscape around the Rodin Museum. “We’re going to take what has been given to us by prior generations, that incredible Parkway, and we’re going to make it better,” said Governor Rendell, who specifically thanked Michael DiBerardinis, Secretary of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Paul R. Levy, President and CEO of the Center City District for their vision and persistence.

Most improvements are scheduled to begin next year and be completed in 2011. The improvements will coincide with significant expansions to both the Art Museum and Free Library, and the relocation of the Barnes Foundation.



Mayor Michael Nutter announces the \$17.1 million Parkway funding package, as Governor Ed Rendell looks on.

CCD Team Helps Avert Injuries in Market Street SUV Explosion

Quick thinking Center City District personnel helped contain a dangerous situation on Market Street in late May when a parked SUV caught fire and exploded. No one was injured, thanks in large part to the CCD team, which mobilized immediately to notify police and fire and control a growing crowd.

Ron Wallace was on his routine rounds, sweeping the sidewalk near the Staples store on the 1100 block of Market at lunchtime, when he was alerted by a passerby to a small fire beneath a black Ford Expedition at curbside. Ron quickly notified community service representatives Lazette Sanchez and Alan Oswald, who were on patrol nearby. Using their radios, the CSRs made a priority call to the CCD dispatcher, who immediately contacted authorities.

In the few minutes before Philadelphia firefighters and police arrived, Lazette and Alan kept a growing crowd of curious passersby clamoring for a closer look back and out of danger. CSRs Terrence Keene and Moses Pierce quickly arrived; Terrence helped move the crowd towards the corner at 11th Street, while Moses stepped into Market Street to keep back automobile traffic.

Their actions weren't a moment too soon; the heat from the rapidly growing fire



Quick-thinking CCD personnel: (left to right) Terrence Keene, Lazette Sanchez, Alan Oswald, Ron Wallace, Moses Pierce

blew out the windshield and windows of the SUV, spewing shattered glass and other debris. Firefighters were able to contain the fire so that there was no further explosion.

For Ron, a 14-year CCD veteran sweeper, Moses, one of the CCD's original CSRs who has served for 17 years and Lazette and Alan, who joined CCD a year

and half ago, it was not a typical day. But with the fast response by firefighters and police and their own quick teamwork, it was all over in a few minutes.

Except, of course, for Ron and fellow sweeper Johnny Cox, who spent another half hour on the scene, sweeping up debris and returning the busy shopping street to normal.

Dealing with Nuisance Businesses

In Philadelphia, a nuisance business is one that is involved in illegal activity, such as selling alcohol to minors, or that creates unreasonable conditions or activities that interfere with public rights or the quality of community life, including generating excessive noise or litter.

The Center City District works closely with the Philadelphia District Attorney's Public Nuisance Task Force to assist businesses or residents who are coping with such difficulties in their neighborhood. The DA's office helps to mobilize impacted community, civic and business groups, concerned citizens, and government agencies to alleviate the problem. These can include the Philadelphia Police

Department, the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement, the PA Liquor Control Board, the Health Department, the Department of Licenses & Inspections, and other city, state and federal agencies, depending on the nature of the complaint.

What should you do if a nuisance business is diminishing the quality of life in your neighborhood? If you witness criminal activity, call 911 for immediate action.

Later in the year, the city's new 311 service is expected to be in place to handle non-emergency situations, like excessive noise. For now, if you have questions about how best to deal with a nuisance

business, call the Public Nuisance Task Force 24-hour hotline at (215) 686-5858. You can also report unlicensed activities, such as street vending, illegal signs, graffiti covered newspaper boxes, and newsstands to Licenses & Inspections at (215) 686-2463.

For a full list of telephone numbers for a variety of concerns, visit www.CenterCityPhila.org and click on "Report a Problem."

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Fall Restaurant Week: September 14-19

It's mid-summer, but not a minute too soon to plan for fall Center City District Restaurant Week, September 14-19. More than 100 downtown restaurants will once again offer three courses for \$35, and there is discount parking, too. Hungry yet? Visit www.CenterCityPhila.org for details and to make your reservations.



RESTAURANT WEEK

The *Center City Digest* is a publication of the Center City District (CCD), a private-sector sponsored municipal authority committed to providing supplemental services that make Philadelphia's downtown clean, safe and attractive; and of Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC) with 50 years of private-sector commitment to the revitalization of downtown Philadelphia.