

# Viaduct Greenway: A Rails-to-Trail Conversion RAISE Grant

## APPENDIX E. PROJECT READINESS

SUBMITTED BY CENTER CITY DISTRICT

### Project Schedule Milestones

Right of way acquisition	January through May 2024
Start of NEPA review	April 2024
Project partnership agreements	May through June 2024
Community engagement	February through June 2024
Grant awarded	June 27, 2024
Design completion	October 2024
Construction documents developed	October through December 2024
Approval of plans, specifications and estimates	October through December 2024
Bid documents issued	March 2025
End of NEPA review	February 2025
Contract bids	April through July 2025
Notice to proceed	July 2025
Mobilization and permits	July through September 2025
Construction start	September 2025
Construction end	August 2027
Statutory obligation deadline	June 30, 2028
All funds expended	Sept 30, 2033

### Environmental Risk Assessment

#### NEPA Status and Environmental Documentation

CCD has not yet begun the NEPA approval process but is aware that this will be a lengthy process. CCD and its consultants are familiar with the NEPA review process, having recently gone through it for a HUD funded Project (6<sup>th</sup> Street Lighting). Our consultant for the Viaduct Greenway, Urban Engineers, has estimated ten months for review and clearance. CCD plans to initiate the review process by April of 2024.

**CCD has completed two rounds of soil and structure characterization** that have revealed moderate to low levels of PCBs, lead, and arsenic, which is consistent with what was discovered in Phase I. Topsoil will be removed and disposed of according to regulations, while lead paint on steel will be removed according to EPA requirements. The deck of the viaduct will be then recovered with clean fill and metal structures painted, as was done on Phase I.

## **Right-of-Way Acquisition Plan**

The process of gaining site control began in June 2023 with the introduction of Bill 230512 into Philadelphia City Council which passed and was signed into law by Mayor Kenney in December 2023. This bill authorizes the City of Philadelphia to take ownership of the parcel by donation, purchase, or condemnation. CCD holds a development agreement with the City, empowering CCD to raise money and design and construct the Viaduct Greenway. Upon transfer of title to the City of Philadelphia, CCD will sign a twenty-year lease with two ten-year options, enabling CCD to improve and manage the property.

CCD anticipates site control by the fall of 2024. The preferred method of conveyance is by donation or sale, though the City has retained legal counsel to carry out the condemnation of a blighting property that has been neglected for more than forty years. CCD has paid for an independent appraisal and is committed to raising any funds needed to establish site control.

## **Public Engagement**

**CCD believes The Viaduct Greenway: A Rails-to-Trail Conversion will be a transformative project for the entire city, not just for its size, but for the positive change that it represents in reversing blight and restoring community connectivity.** CCD is committed to meaningfully incorporating community input into the project's design, and has thus retained Connect the Dots, a well-respected engagement firm that has provided services for large-scale public-facing projects such as the conversion of Philadelphia's former police headquarters (The Roundhouse) and the re-imagining of the Greater Philadelphia region's mass transit authority's bus system (SEPTA's Bus Revolution). Connect the Dots has begun their initial phase of information gathering and through June 2024 will be conducting stakeholder interviews, popping up at community events, and surveying residents. They will deliver an initial report to support park design mid-summer.

CCD began engaging community leaders in July of 2023 to share preliminary design concepts and discuss some of the concerns around creating a new park in an area beleaguered by the lingering impacts of an abandoned viaduct. It was clear from those conversations that, together with these community groups, a plan for funding the park and retaining affordability needed to evolve in parallel with this project's development.

# State and Local Approvals

CCD has shared project details with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) and they have stated that the Viaduct Greenway would be added to the TIP once capital funding has been attained. We anticipate no difficulty being added to the TIP at the appropriate time.

Elected officials who have been briefed on the project and have come out in support of it include Philadelphia City Councilman Mark Squilla, State Representative Mary Isaacson, State Senator Nikil Saval, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, Congressman Brendan Boyle, and Senator Bob Casey.

Neighborhood groups that have provided support for the project with letters or written testimony include The Friends of The Rail Park, the Callowhill Neighborhood Association, the West Poplar Neighborhood Association, Philadelphia Chinatown Community Development Corporation, and the 14<sup>th</sup> Ward Registered Community Organization.

The Viaduct Greenway is specifically called out in Philadelphia2035, the city's master development plan. It is also a focal point of the Callowhill-Chinatown North Strategic Plan with an emphasis on the dearth of green space within a ten-minute walk of the viaduct.

CCD's engineering consultant Urban Engineers will provide all documents necessary to secure all anticipated local permits and approvals for this project. A list of those documents is included in the **Additional Information Appendix**.

# Assessment of Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

**CCD and Urban Engineer's experience with Phase I has reduced many of the unknowns of restoring this old viaduct.** To prepare for Phase II, Urban Engineers conducted a feasibility study in 2022 that found all fifteen bridges and the main steel structure to be sound, requiring mostly minor repair, though in some cases, more intensive repair. Based on what was discovered in Phase I with the removal of ballast from the topside of the viaduct, uncertainties that might impact the project schedule or budget could include:

- Discovering additional needed environmental mitigation
- Uncovering a worse structural condition than previously noted
- A delay in acquiring permits or approvals
- The availability of US certified steel

Of course, before any of those issues could impact the project, we must secure site control. The biggest risk facing the project is acquiring the parcel, which may require condemnation if donation or a sale cannot be negotiated. CCD has already garnered significant pledges that will be triggered with the passing of title to the City of Philadelphia in order to facilitate condemnation. There is some potential that the compensation required exceeds CCD's ability to fundraise, and the project is delayed until a

resolution can be found. CCD is working closely with City attorneys and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission to reduce such a risk.

## Technical Capacity

CCD has a long track record of restoring and managing public spaces. To date, the organization has made major renovations to five public parks in Philadelphia:

- Aviator Park
- Dilworth Park
- John F. Collins Park
- The Rail Park, Phase I
- Sister Cities Park

CCD manages all but The Rail Park which is now under the jurisdiction of the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation. Additionally, CCD manages Cret Park through a lease with the City of Philadelphia. Three of these have sub-leased concessions which help reduce the cost of cleaning, greening, and keeping the parks safe.

## Federal Funding and Regulations Experience

CCD has completed \$150 million of capital improvements since 1991, leveraging tens of millions of philanthropic, state, and federal funding. Federal grants that CCD has successfully stewarded include:

- USDOT, 2011
- National Endowment of the Arts, 2017
- USDOT TIGER, 2006
- USDOT TIGER 2017
- HUD Community Earmark, 2023
- \$388,700 for Sister Cities Park Phase II
- \$20,000 for Pulse art installation
- \$1,750,000 for Aviator Park
- \$15,000,000 for Dilworth Park renovation
- \$500,000 for 6<sup>th</sup> Street Lighting

CCD has adhered to federal contract and procurement regulations on these projects. CCD has internal staff with significant institutional knowledge from having worked on those projects and Phase I of The Rail Park and is capable of successfully following the Davis Bacon Act, Buy America, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## Project Planning and Delivery Capacity

With a budget of \$34 million, Center City District is the country's largest downtown organization. We provide safe and clean services to 560 acres of the city's office core plus fee for service delivery to adjacent neighborhoods. The organization has a more than twenty-year track record of improving public spaces and funding or financing capital projects. Dilworth Park, which sits at the base of City Hall in downtown Philadelphia, was a \$55 million capital improvement that required coordination with the City of Philadelphia, the Southeast Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and New Jersey Transit (PATCO). Completed in 2013, this highly complex project converted an underutilized plaza into a world-class public space that welcomed the million visitors in 2023. The redesign has improved access to mass transit with new



Figure 1 Dilworth Park, completed

headhouses, improved pedestrian circulation, a great lawn, planting beds, seating, better lighting, and historical storytelling signage. It also includes a large interactive piece of public art, Pulse, which is part sprayground, part light and mist show that offers a cooling station to thousands of Philadelphians during the summer. The plaza is now programmed year-round with a skate rink, free concerts, and concessions.



*Figure 2 Phase I of The Rail Park under construction*

Phase I of The Rail Park was also a complex project that involved significant engineering and planning, though it was not funded by federal dollars. This \$11 million renovation of the western spur of the Reading Viaduct was owned by SEPTA and required a close partnership with them and some of the same community groups involved with The Viaduct Greenway.

## Financial Completeness

CCD and our project partners view the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to repair decades of economic and environmental injustices by bringing the Viaduct Greenway to life. Progress has been fast-paced thus far, with a legal description being developed, environmental testing and conceptual design being completed all within a year. Over the next few months, community engagement and schematic design will also be completed in preparation for the next tranche of Reconnecting Communities funding in the fall.

CCD has begun seeking funding through various state sources. We have already been awarded \$94,912 for environmental testing and have pending applications of \$653,128 for construction documents and \$475,000 for site preparation.

The largest source of state money for construction will come from the Pennsylvania Redevelopment and Capital Program which is decided at the discretion of the Governor. Governor Shapiro has been supportive of this project and we anticipate this grant being made. Our request is \$20,000,000 and the grant will be announced in the fall of 2024.

As stated, CCD plans to pursue the Reconnecting Communities/Neighborhood Access grant in the fall. Additionally, we intend to apply for the EPA Community Change grant shortly after the submission of this RAISE application. Collectively, we believe these grants plus state and private funding will bring us to the estimate of \$71 million by the spring of 2025.

The estimate presented with this application was developed by a licensed engineer and is informed by our experience on Phase I. Reasonable contingencies are built into this estimate and we feel the risk of overruns is lessened because the same engineering and design team is in place from Phase I. Should we encounter cost overruns in excess of the contingencies within our estimate, our first course of action would be to approach the two private donors and one foundation who have already pledged \$4 million as the “first money in” donors, followed by a second tier of private donors, followed by state funding.