



RENEW > Historic Preservation

Cultural, Historical, and Architectural Resources

Philadelphia's inheritance of buildings, representing more than three centuries of construction, has yielded a handsome, complex city, especially in the Central District. The buildings and urban infrastructure of Center City are at the same time mundane and exalted, repetitive and unique—all characteristic of life in Philadelphia. Philadelphia has one of the most complete collections of buildings from almost all periods of architectural design in this nation, and many of the examples are in the Central District itself.

For decades now, the Central District has experienced reinvestment in its building stock. The practice of adaptive reuse of the city's older structures, out of favor just a little more than a generation ago, is generally embraced as a sensible and sustainable strategy. In addition, reuse offers developers an economical way to showcase the built heritage of Philadelphia that has almost universal appeal to homebuyers and commercial interests.

Special emphasis must be placed on identifying historic resources and broadening our understanding of the buildings and structures that might be certified historic. While the Central District already includes one of the greatest concentrations of local historic districts in the city, protection for historic industrial resources may yet yield results in furthering the interpretation of Philadelphia's legacy as "The Workshop of the World."

Philadelphia's neighborhoods have long been anchored by schools and churches that are now either vacant or underutilized. Since these buildings were often designed to high standards, and built of materials that could hardly be afforded today, their continued function in giving identity and character to a neighborhood is critical. Churches and schools often define a community—and these structures were built well to underscore that role. Repurposing these structures, or enhancing a partially used church or school with new functions must be a priority in furthering neighborhood viability.

Some neighborhoods or pockets of neighborhoods became associated with particular ethnic groups that tended to settle together—Italians, Jews, African Americans, Poles, for example. These ethnic enclaves, perhaps now not so well-defined or intact, should be identified, and their key assets protected and interpreted. Neighborhood assets that are associated with these early ethnic settlements can be recognized through historical designation, reuse with appropriate interpretation and effective signage.

Philadelphia's City Hall, a National Historical Landmark, is a uniquely significant building and demands continuing maintenance, as well as some thoughtful repurposing that will enable it to be even more useful to city staff, citizens, and tourists. Built at the intersection of the widest streets of William Penn's plan, its location alone underscores its urban grandeur. Over the last decade and a half, City Hall has been cleaned on the exterior, reroofed, and some of its significant detailing, in both iron and stone, has been restored, but the work is ongoing. The four entrance portals of the building must be cleaned, repaired, and better lit to become more attractive and useful to those working in and visiting the building as well as creating attractive entrances to the courtyard.



*Philadelphia2035
Citywide Vision*

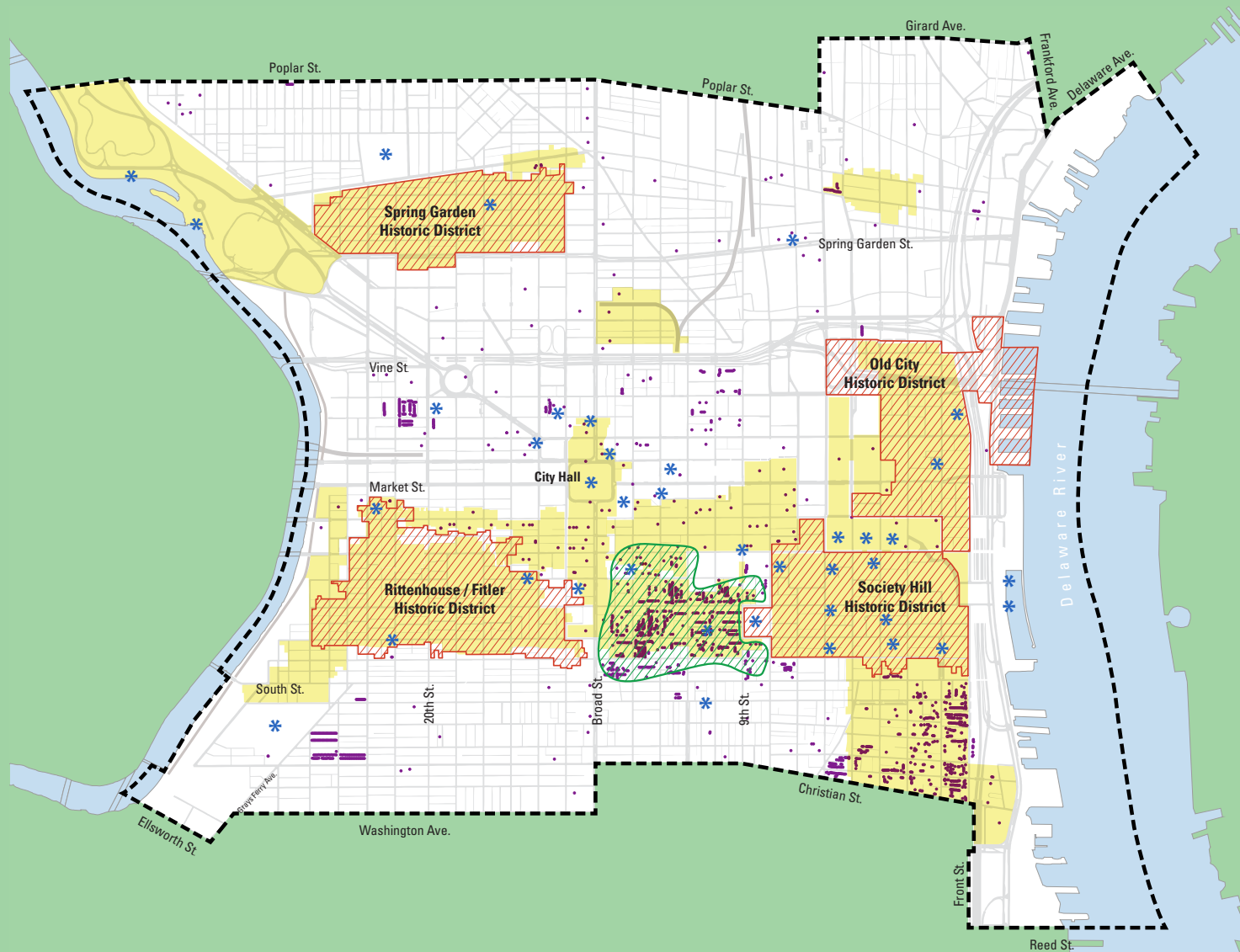
Goal 8.1:
Support sensitive
development that
preserves and enhances
Philadelphia's multifaceted
past.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the federal government's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed worthy of preservation. Owners of income-producing properties listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places or of properties that are contributing resources within a National Register Historic District may be eligible for tax credits for the rehabilitation of the historic structure.

Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) is responsible for ensuring the preservation of historically significant buildings, structures, sites, objects, interiors, and districts in the city. The Commission identifies and designates historic resources, listing them on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. It regulates preservation through the City's building and other permitting processes.



Historic Resources

- Philadelphia Register of Historic Places
- ▨ Historic District - Philadelphia Register of Historic Places
- * National Historic Landmark (N.H.L.)
- Nationally Registered Historic District
- ▨ Nominated Washington Square West Historic District

- Old City
- Society Hill
- Independence National Park
- Washington Square West
- Center City East
- Broad Street
- Center City West
- Rittenhouse Square
- Schuylkill (Ramcat)
- Spring Garden
- Callowhill Industrial
- Fairmount Park
- Southwark (Queen Village)
- Northern Liberties



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Recommendations



City Hall



JFK Bridge over the Schuylkill River

59. Invest in and rehabilitate City Hall to a level that is commensurate with its National Historic Landmark status. [see [Focus Areas](#), p. 30]
 - Hire an “Architect of City Hall” to oversee all changes/renovations to the building
 - Clean and restore the four entrance portals and corner stair entrances
 - Restore circulation patterns on the first and third floors
 - Explore opening some of the ground floor space for commercial use to generate revenue and animate the area
 - Explore investment in sustainable building upgrades and stormwater management infrastructure
 - > Implementing Agencies: DPP, PHC, PCPC, PWD, MOS | CW Objective: 8.1.1
60. Identify and designate important industrial buildings in Northern Liberties and Callowhill neighborhoods to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.
 - > Implementing Agencies: PHC, nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.2
61. Identify and designate historic resources in key areas to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places:
 - Along commercial corridors of Chestnut Street, Walnut Street, Broad Street, Ridge Avenue, North 4th Street and North 5th Street
 - Early 20th century commercial buildings
 - Pier buildings along the Delaware River
 - Schuylkill River bridges
 - Civic buildings, such as fire station at 11th and South Streets
 - > Implementing Agencies: PHC, nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.3
62. Designate a historic district in the Washington Square West area to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.
 - > Implementing Agencies: PHC | CW Objective: 8.1.1
63. Issue RFPs for building preservation and reuse of defunct or vacant school buildings:
 - Old Spring Garden School on Poplar Street
 - Philadelphia High School of Business Technology
 - Benjamin Franklin High School
 - William Pierce School
 - > Implementing Agencies: SDP, PHA | CW Objective: 8.1.3
64. Facilitate partnerships to utilize underused religious buildings.
 - Partner arts organizations with congregations with large facilities
 - Provide flexibility in the building code to accommodate uses other than religious services in existing buildings
 - > Implementing Agencies: MOACCE, L&I, nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.5
65. Identify and designate historic resources based on ethnic and cultural importance to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.
 - > Implementing Agencies: PHC, nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.7



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Heritage Tourism

The Central District offers visitors a comprehensive look at one of America's premier colonial capitols. Two of the most iconic treasures of the nation's early history, Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, are located here. Nearly all Americans know that and millions of visitors come to Philadelphia to see them. However, the city has so much more than colonial heritage.

If the 18th century represents Philadelphia as the seat of the American Revolution and capital of the new nation, 19th-century Philadelphia is characterized by the advent and flowering of the Industrial Revolution, a time in which Philadelphia earned the nickname of "Workshop of the World." Though industrial heritage has not been underscored in attracting tourists to the city, it could be. Philadelphia is the city where Benjamin Franklin made his first experiments concerning the properties of electricity, and it is also the city where the first all-purpose digital computer was invented, heralding the "Information Age" that defines our time.

Besides its breadth of history, Philadelphia is also important for its role in the arts. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway links many of the well-known institutions, such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Rodin Museum, and the Barnes Foundation. Performing arts have had a long history in Philadelphia. The Central District is home to a number of performing arts venues, including the Kimmel Center, the Walnut Street Theatre, and the Fringe Festival as well as many smaller performing-arts groups and venues. The district also boasts of one of the most vibrant theater concentrations in the nation.

To assist tourists with all that the Central District offers, and the list above is far from complete, wayfinding and historic information would be extremely helpful and would add to the visitor experience. Tours, locations, routes, rates, ticket availability, and times that the venues open and close can all be offered through traditional signage at key locations as well as handheld or smartphone technologies. In addition, a TKTS-style kiosk, perhaps within the courtyard of City Hall, would offer not only the foregoing information, but would be a real-time venue for the purchase of tickets to a multitude of concerts, performances, art venues, and museums throughout the Central District.

The Benjamin Franklin Parkway has been overburdened by the number of celebrations that are hosted there each year. Admittedly, it is a very handsome location. However, the Parkway has just been relandscaped and relamped, in addition, beautifully paved sidewalks and bike lanes have been added. The many celebrations on the Parkway continually lead to substantial degradation to its handsome streetscape. Philadelphia has other venues that can host the city's many events and parades, including Independence Mall, the Centennial District, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park, and the Schuylkill River Trail.

Recommendations

66. **Add historic district designations to standard street signs.**
 - > Implementing Agencies: Streets | CW Objective: 8.2.1
67. **Create overall interpretive signage system for historic sites throughout the district.**
 - Replace and expand on existing physical signs found throughout Society Hill
 - Create a digital information program that could be accessed by smartphones and other technology
 - > Implementing Agencies: DPP, Streets, INHP, nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.2.1
68. **Relocate major events to occur in various locations around the city to relieve the overburdened Benjamin Franklin Parkway.**
 - > Implementing Agencies: MDO, PPR | CW Objectives: 8.2.2, 6.3.3



Case Study | Grand Rapids QR Tours

Grand Rapids, Michigan implemented an interactive historic walking tour using QR codes posted at historic sites throughout the downtown. The codes are scannable with any QR barcode reader applications installed on an internet enabled smartphone. Once scanned, they connect visitors with facts about the location, a gallery of historic photos and an audio history related to the site.