



# RENEW > Historic Preservation

## Cultural, Historical, and Architectural Resources

At the height of Philadelphia's industrial age, the city was known as the textile capital of the world. The neighborhood of Kensington was at the center of this thriving industry, home to almost half of the city's cloth, clothing, and carpet factories, alongside related trades such as dye works, machine shops, and box factories. While some of these factories are on the National Register of Historic Places, as a part of the Kensington Industrial Thematic District, they are not protected with designation to the Philadelphia Register. Today, many of these buildings are abandoned or underutilized; however, some are being repurposed for new manufacturing enterprises and live-work spaces.


The River Wards District has been the site of many historic events that have shaped its development over time. Some important themes in history of the district include the presence of the Lenni Lenape Indian tribe, the rise of the manufacturing and industrial era, and the introduction of modern transportation. Today, there are many significant industrial, religious, educational, institutional, and residential sites, including iconic view-sheds or points that contribute to the district's sense of place. As sites age, it will be important to consider eligibility for designation and protection, and to explore appropriate adaptive reuses of underutilized sites.

Like many neighborhoods that have welcomed immigrants from a variety of faiths, the River Wards District has a large collection of churches and places of worship that reflect its immigration history. Along Allegheny Avenue, the spires of three prominent churches dominate the skyline. As congregations dwindle or need financial help, finding appropriate partners to revitalize these buildings will be key. One such program is run by the Partners for Sacred Places, which pairs arts and other organizations with churches to share these spaces.

Only 31 properties within the River Wards are listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. All of these local properties fall within Fishtown. To address this inconsistency, four potential historic districts have been identified, all of which have been determined eligible (DOE) for the National Register of Historic Places. These include the Fishtown Historic District (DOE 1994), Richmond Industrial Historic District (DOE 1994), Kensington/Allegheny Historic District (DOE 1999), and the Port Richmond Historic District (DOE 2014). A survey also needs to be done to determine the potential historic resources in Bridesburg.

### Recommendations

39. Identify and designate historic resources to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places to recognize significant places of worship, industrial, institutional, landmark and residential resources:
  - Preserve the viewshed of the landmark Allegheny Avenue churches, including St. Adalbert Polish Roman Catholic Church, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, and Our Lady Help of Christians Church
  - Schlichter Jute & Cordage Factory/Sterling Paper Company
  - Harbison's Dairies and Milk Bottle Water Tower
  - Lithuanian Music Hall
  - Carnegie Library, Free Library of Philadelphia, Richmond Branch
    - > Implementing Agencies: PHC, PCPC, Nonprofits | CW Objectives: 8.1.1
40. Pursue nomination of individual or groups of buildings that are a part of the Kensington Textile Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) to the National Register.
  - > Implementing Agencies: PHMC, PCPC, Nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.1



**Philadelphia2035**  
*Citywide Vision*

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



### Definition | *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.



### Definition | *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places*

The 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.

For more information, visit  
[www.phila.gov/historical/register](http://www.phila.gov/historical/register).



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### Definition |

#### *Partners for Sacred Places*

Partners for Sacred Places is an organization that advocates for sound stewardship and active community use of architecturally significant houses of worship that are home to shrinking congregations. PSP connects religious organizations with community artists to broaden the base of support for their vital and beautiful buildings.

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### Recommendations

41. Survey in Bridesburg and re-survey the Fishtown Historic District to identify sites that best represent the historical development of the area.
  - Nominate the districts to the Philadelphia Register.
    - > Implementing Agencies: PHC, PCPC, Nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.1
42. Facilitate partnerships to find appropriate users and accommodate adaptive reuse options for underused places of worship.
  - Partner arts and culture organizations with congregations of large facilities; and
  - Provide flexibility in regulations to accommodate uses other than religious services in existing buildings.
    - > Implementing Agencies: PHC, MOACCE, L&I, Nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.5
43. Preserve immigrant history and heritage in Port Richmond through programs, wayfinding signage, and historic markers.
  - > Implementing Agencies: PMHC, MOACCE, Commerce, Nonprofits | CW Objective: 8.1.1

## > Archaeological Work within the I-95 Reconstruction Project

Archaeological resources are abundant in the River Wards District, as evidenced by the research done for the Interstate-95 reconstruction. The *I-95/Girard Avenue Interchange Reconstruction Project* area extends roughly from the Vine St. Expressway to Allegheny Avenue in the Port Richmond neighborhood. Thus far, excavations have been limited to the Fishtown and Port Richmond neighborhoods, and work within the Northern Liberties neighborhood will be up-and-coming.

Information regarding the archaeological discoveries from this project are being compiled in an interactive digital report, which is web based and accessible by the public. The report is a work in progress and will be continuously updated with more information as the project is completed.

Finding a permanent home for these artifacts for the public to view and learn about the vast history of the River Wards is an important step to preserving these fragile resources.

For more information, visit [www.diggingi95.com](http://www.diggingi95.com).



Top: Example of glass artifacts recovered from the project.  
Bottom: Example of Dyottville Glass Works excavations.

## River Wards Historic Resources

### Legend

- Kensington Textile MPDF
- National Registered Eligible
- National Registered Listed
- Philadelphia Registered Listed
- National Registered Eligible Districts (exact boundaries to be determined)



Northeast Sewage  
Treatment Plant

Richmond  
Station

In an effort to support the rehabilitation of historic industrial buildings, the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia worked with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission on a program (Multiple Property Documentation Form) that makes it easier for owners of these properties to qualify for federal historic preservation tax credits. The program streamlines the process of listing textile-related industrial buildings in Kensington to the National Register of Historic Places. The MPDF identifies over forty potentially eligible properties.

