

*Planning Excellence Award for Best Practice Nomination:*

**PHILADELPHIA'S INTEGRATED PLANNING AND ZONING PROCESS**

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**NARRATIVE**

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission's (PCPC's) **Integrated Planning and Zoning Process** is an innovative approach to leveraging the synergy between citizen education, strategic planning, and zoning reform to achieve higher goals. As a best practice, this integrated process is fully transferable to other public planning organizations, particularly when the planning and regulatory activities occur simultaneously in a relatively short period of time.

By carefully coordinating three distinct activities—(1) the Citizens Planning Institute, (2) *Philadelphia2035*, and (3) a new Zoning Code and map revisions—the PCPC generated positive outcomes that would not have occurred had the activities proceeded independently. Individually, the activities educated hundreds of citizens and professionals, and engaged thousands in envisioning the future of Philadelphia and improving the way development is regulated. Collectively, they created an environment that hadn't existed for 50 years: where the city not only adopted a new comprehensive plan and Zoning Code, but did so in the same calendar year (2011). More broadly, the three activities raise planning and development practices in Philadelphia to a new level, contributing to Philadelphia becoming "a place of choice," one of Mayor Michael Nutter's strategic goals for the city.

The **Citizens Planning Institute** (CPI) is the City Planning Commission's education and public participation entity. Established in 2010 to create a cadre of informed civic leaders across all neighborhoods, and to help residents become active participants in planning their communities and understand anticipated changes to zoning regulations, the CPI now boasts 120 graduates or "citizen planners." Its original semi-annual curriculum of three core planning and development courses has expanded to include elective courses (e.g., preservation, green infrastructure) and specialized training sessions for practitioners and others. Most recently, through a series of 19 classes, the CPI trained more than 150 city officials, and planning, legal, design, and other professionals to use the new zoning code. These trainings will be supplemented by a community-focused module that will roll out in summer 2012.

**Philadelphia2035** is the city's first comprehensive plan undertaken in more than five decades. Begun in 2009, the *Citywide Vision* portion was adopted by the City Planning Commission in June 2011 and nests physical-development policies, long-term goals, objectives, and implementation strategies into nine elements within three forward-looking themes: Thrive, Connect, and Renew. The preparation of 18 *District Plans* follows, each with a strategic focus on future land-use and zoning changes, city capital investment, and place-based recommendations. Two *District Plans* are adopted, two are in progress, and the remaining 14 will be completed over the next five years. At the core of *Philadelphia2035* is an em-

phasis on PCPC as the agency for coordinating implementation activities and measuring results with and for its many partners. Through an ongoing series of “Exchange Meetings,” planners lead working sessions with two dozen implementation-agency representatives to ensure alignment of numerous city-sponsored projects with *Philadelphia2035* objectives, thereby helping to achieve the outcomes to which the *Citywide Vision* aspires. This results-driven activity also serves to measure progress on both *Citywide Vision* goals and objectives and *District Plan* strategies.

**Zoning reform** refers to two closely related activities: (1) the wholesale rewriting of Philadelphia’s 50-year-old code and (2) carrying out of multiple zoning-map revisions. A voter referendum in 2007 initiated the reform process, which was led by a 31-member volunteer Zoning Code Commission (ZCC), supported by strong consulting expertise. The transparent four-year process included an unprecedented amount of public participation and “raised the bar” for future public processes. More than 3,400 persons participated through 50 televised ZCC public meetings, 36 community-based meetings, 125 code-user interviews, and surveys, among other outreach methods. The work of the ZCC resulted in a modern, substantially streamlined and illustrated Zoning Code that was adopted by City Council and signed into law in December 2011. The code goes into effect in August 2012. The first zoning-map revision, implemented as a result of the adopted *Philadelphia2035 West Park District Plan*, was approved by the PCPC in June 2012.

The synergy created by carefully integrating the three activities is our best practice for ensuring effectiveness and results. Citizen planners testified before City Council in support of the new Zoning Code, and ***the code passed***. The new code provides 21<sup>st</sup>-century regulatory tools to ***make positive land-use change happen*** into the future. The CPI purposefully reaches out to communities with low-capacity civic leadership where *District Plans* are scheduled soon, and those ***District Plans are better informed***. Each *District Plan’s* citizen advisory committee helps to tee-up continued participation in the subsequent zoning-map revision process, and that leads to ***approved map revisions***. The 25 topic-specific goals of the *Citywide Vision* are explicitly carried forward to each *District Plan*, and further detailed on a place-based basis, making the *District Plans* truly ***strategic and focused on implementation***.

**Philadelphia’s Integrated Planning and Zoning Process** is an ambitious and history-making success for one of the Commonwealth’s most diverse and complex cities, but is entirely replicable in other communities. The key is in the synergy of all three elements, which resulted in a comprehensive approach to continuous improvement. It allows planners to demonstrate how education results in policy reform, policy reform leads to innovative regulatory changes, and improved regulations implement community visions and plans.