

RCOs: A Philadelphia Model for Community Input in Planning



Registered Community Organizations

October 12, 2014

2:30pm-3:45pm

**2014 Annual Conference
PA Chapter of APA**



Panel



- Eleanor Sharpe, AICP, LEED AP, Deputy Executive Director-Legislative Affairs, Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC)
- Andrew Meloney, Senior Planner - PCPC
- Donna J. Carney, Director-Citizens Planning Institute - PCPC
- David Goldfarb, East Passyunk Crossing Civic Association, Zoning Committee Chair

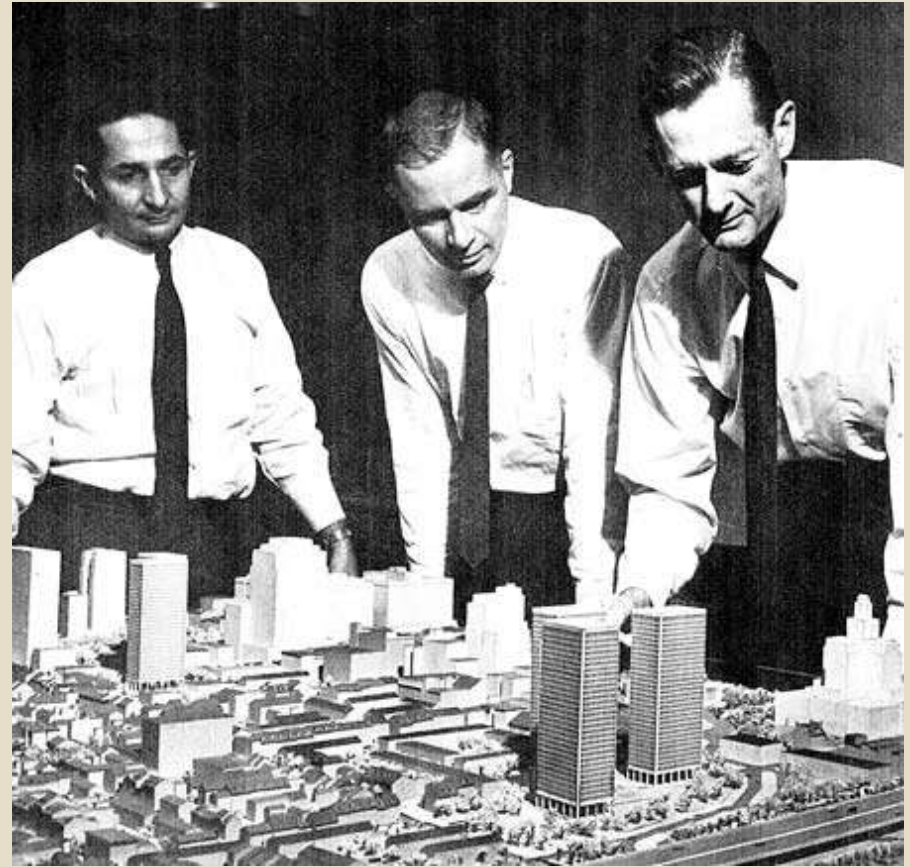
Presentation Outline



1. Philadelphia Zoning Code Reform
2. Role of Registered Community Organizations
3. Implementing the Process- Lessons Learned
4. Training & Support
5. RCO Best Practices
6. Q&A

Zoning Code Reform- 2007-2011

- Why was Reform Necessary?
- Last major zoning code revision in 1962
- Voter referendum 2007-
Zoning Code Commission



BACKGROUND

- The Zoning Code Commission (ZCC) was formed through a charter change in 2007
- 31-member Zoning Code Commission created to reform and modernize the zoning code
- New code adopted on December 22, 2011
- New code **effective on August 22, 2012**

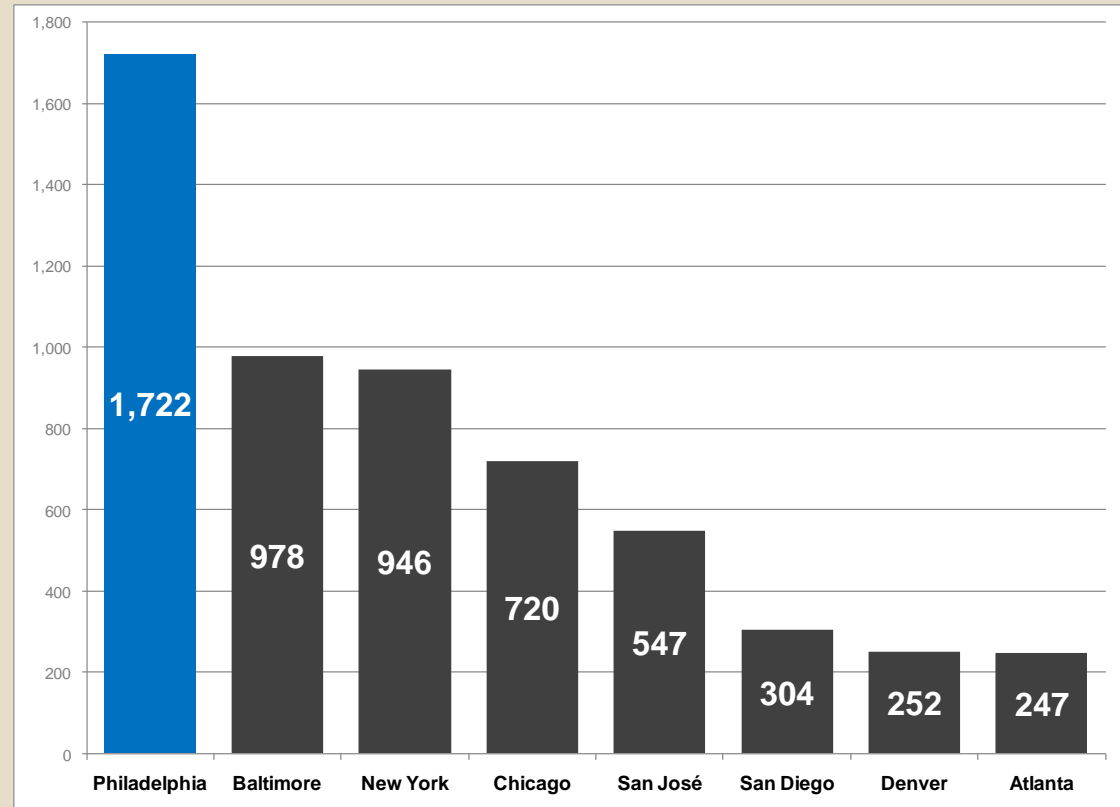


Reasons to Update the Code

Last major code revision in 1962.
Common criticisms:

- “Too confusing”
- “A broken system”
- “Unpredictable results”
- “Outdated”

Variance Appeals per Year

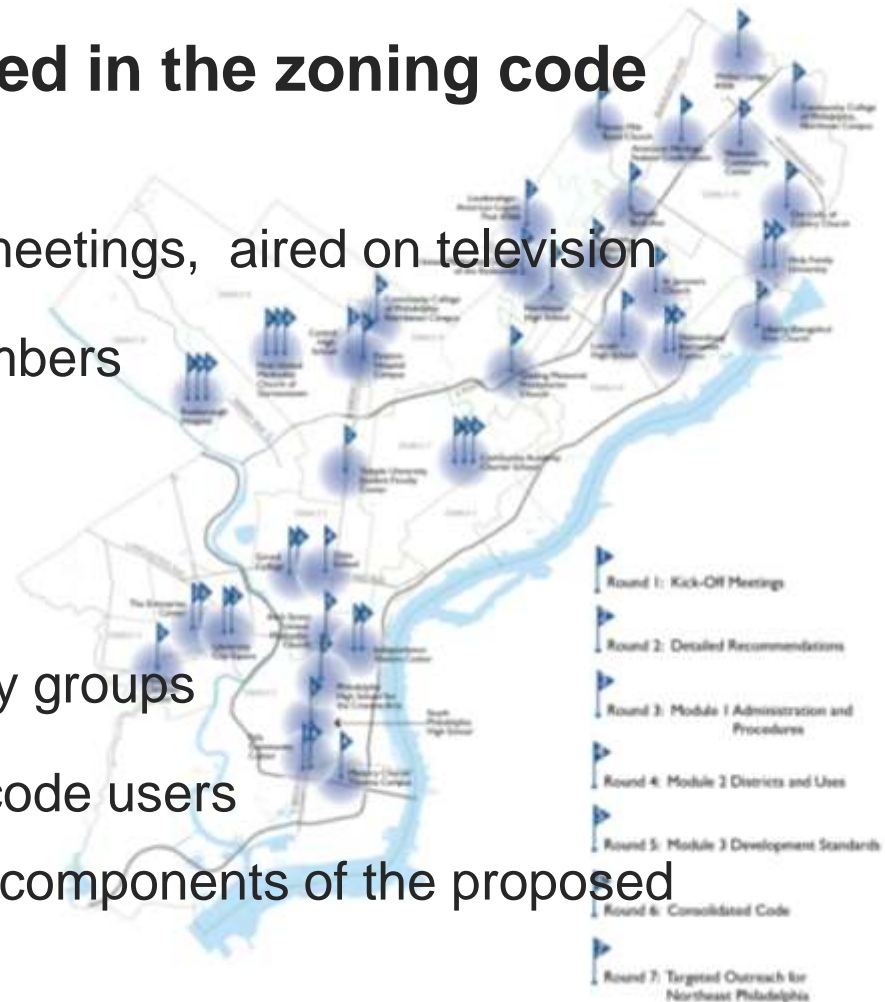


Citizen Engagement



Over 3,400 citizens were involved in the zoning code rewrite effort:

- 50 Zoning Code Commission public meetings, aired on television
- 2 public hearings in City Council chambers
- 7 Stakeholder X-Changes
- 36 community-based meetings
- Dozens of presentations to community groups
- Interviewed 125 professional zoning code users
- Surveyed nearly 2,000 individuals on components of the proposed new zoning code.



Objectives of Zoning Code Reform



- **Provide consistency and understandability of the zoning code**
- Make future construction and development more predictable
- Encourage high quality, positive development
- Preserve the character of existing neighborhoods
- **Involve the public in development decisions**

Under prior Zoning Code:



- No standard procedure for zoning applicants to notify civic associations.
- Contention between neighborhood groups that claimed jurisdiction over overlapping areas.
- Informal system was unfair to groups with less resources/less ability to organize.



Models from Comparable US Cities

Chicago:

- Team of planning staff works within geographic district

Miami:

- Open & public planning process; residents can track their feedback

Atlanta: *Neighborhood Planning Units*

- Open membership, overseen by City planner, non-overlapping boundaries, advisory body

Denver:

- Registered Neighborhood associations (RNOs)
- Registration with the City is required

New York City: *Community Boards*

- First stop for civic associations to voice concerns
- Too formal for Philadelphia

Registered Community Organizations



New citywide system for registering community organizations with the Planning Commission



Neighborhood Notice & Meetings



1. Formalizes the role of community organizations in the development process (RCO's);
2. Creates a standard for **notice and meetings**;
3. Applicable when application requires either:
 - **Zoning Board approval** (variance/special exception)
or
 - **Civic Design Review**



Registered Community Organizations RCOs
Workshops
June 3 & June 20

Registration = Notification

Zoning Notification Registration is early notification of Zoning Board cases

Zoning Notification Registration is needed for Civic Design Review (CDR) participation

- **Registration is not needed to attend or submit testimony to Zoning Board**
- **Anyone may attend or testify at a Zoning Board hearing**
- **Registration is not needed to be a civic or neighborhood association in Philadelphia**
- **Registration does establish greater influence over Zoning Board decisions**
- **Registration is not notification of all development projects, just appeals to zoning refusals by L&I**
- **Zoning Board considers multiple factors in determining hardship**

Decision-Maker



**Independent agency of
L&I appointed by the
Mayor:**

- **Grants dimensional and use variances**
- **Grants special exception approvals**
- **Hears *appeals* of zoning decisions made by L&I**

ZBA

**Zoning
Board of
Adjustment**



Civic Design Review

Review of **LARGE** Projects that are likely to have a significant impact on the “public realm”

- Developer
- Community
- General Public

Process is **mandatory**-recommendations are **advisory**.



Civic Design Review Committee



The Civic Design Review Committee

- 7-person committee, including 6 permanent and one rotating seat. Mayor appoints the permanent members
 - 4 specified design professionals
 - 1 developer/builder
 - 1 civic association representative
 - **Rotating seat(s) filled by up to (2) RCOs**
- Chaired by a member of the City Planning Commission

Registered Community Organizations

Qualifying Criteria:

- An adopted statement of purpose.
- Geographic area with no more than 20,000 parcels and boundaries set forth in the organization's governing rules.
- Regular meetings that are publicly-announced (hard copy or electronically) and open to the public.
- Open meetings held on a regularly scheduled basis.
- Leadership chosen by membership-at-large by elections.
- Status valid for 2 years.

Registered Community Organizations

Responsibilities:

1. Alert membership of ZBA hearing cases and Civic Design Review cases.
2. Agree to meet with applicants within 45 days.
3. If selected as a “Coordinating” RCO, schedule and host public meeting with applicant.
4. Document & send written meeting summary.
5. Representative sits on CDR committee for projects within boundaries.

Benefits



- Community involvement in development as advisory entity
- Burden on communities and applicants, not on the City
- Improved coordination between developers and communities and greater accountability
- Some areas that didn't have representation before, have it now.

Lessons Learned???



- Burdensome transition for PCPC and applicants
 - Registration and Notification
- Notification requirements = burden for small projects
- Enforceability
- “Political” organizations, such as Ward Committees, qualify as RCOs
- Criteria and minimum qualifications for RCOs
- Coordination between overlapping RCOs

Training & Support



Education & Outreach for the
Philadelphia City Planning
Commission



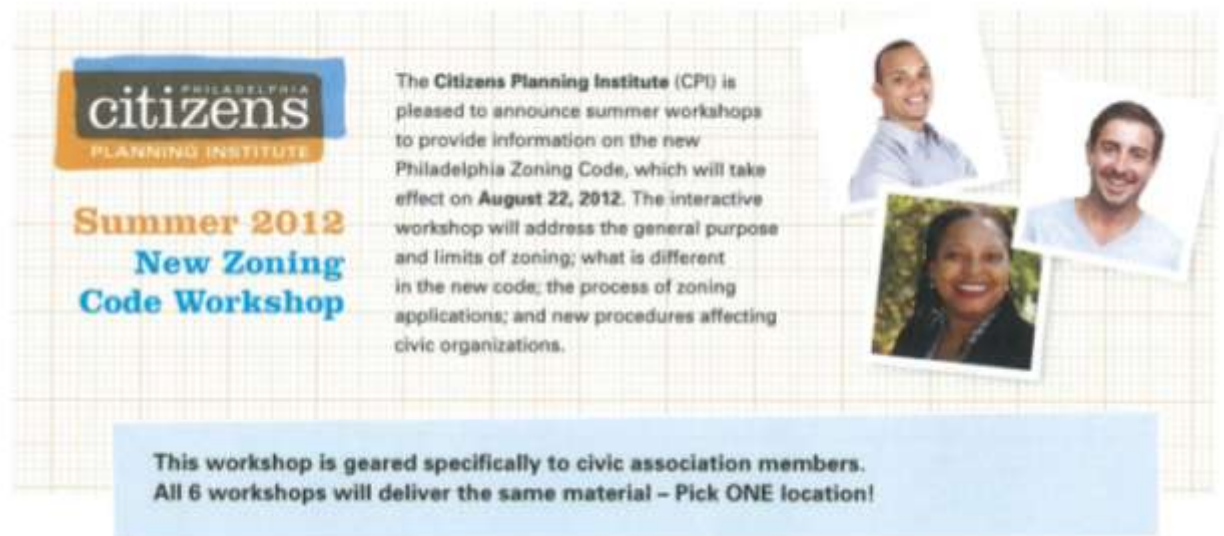


Zoning Code Trainings & RCO Workshops

-45 classes & workshops

-over 750 participants in 2 years!

- Train the Trainer sessions (5)
- Public Zoning Training series (29)
- Community Workshops (6)
- RCO Clinics- [regulation changes](3)
- RCO Workshops (2)



The flyer for the Citizens Planning Institute (CPI) Summer 2012 New Zoning Code Workshop features a grid background. On the left is the CPI logo with the text 'citizens PHILADELPHIA PLANNING INSTITUTE'. Below it, the text 'Summer 2012 New Zoning Code Workshop' is displayed in orange and blue. To the right, a paragraph of text explains the purpose of the workshops. On the far right, there are three overlapping portrait photos of diverse individuals. At the bottom, a light blue box contains a call to action.

The **Citizens Planning Institute (CPI)** is pleased to announce summer workshops to provide information on the new Philadelphia Zoning Code, which will take effect on **August 22, 2012**. The interactive workshop will address the general purpose and limits of zoning; what is different in the new code; the process of zoning applications; and new procedures affecting civic organizations.

This workshop is geared specifically to civic association members. All 6 workshops will deliver the same material – Pick ONE location!

June RCO Workshops

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Recording Questions
- **Part 1:**
Development & the Approvals Process
- **Part 2:**
The Role of RCOs & Best Practices
- Resources



Neighborhood Notice & Meetings

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Day 1

*Day 7

*Day 17

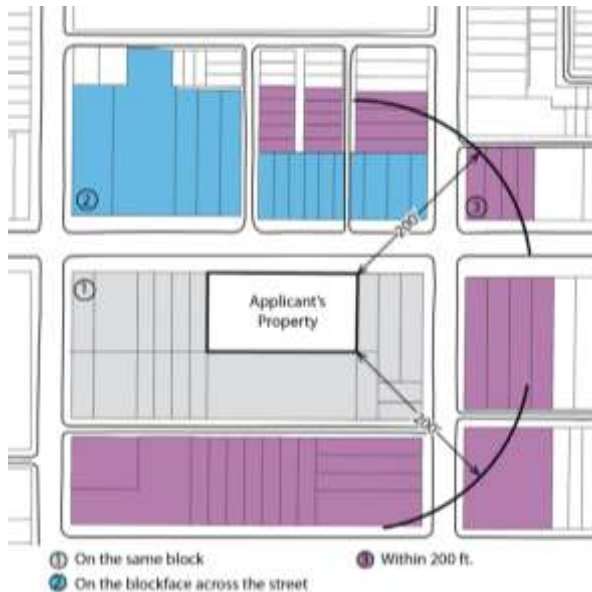
*Day 45

*ZBA Appeal
File Date*

Applicant Notifies
RCOs and Affected
Property Owners

Neighborhood Meetings held and documented

**Number of days reflects maximum notification windows of time*



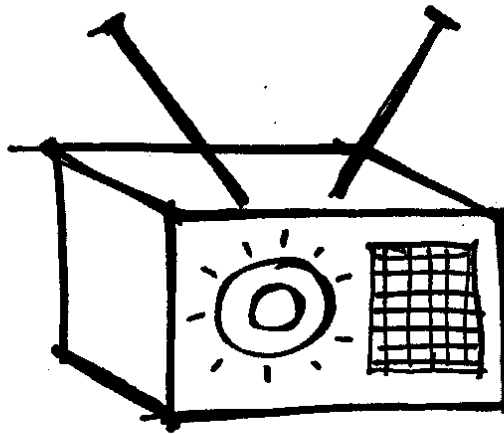
“Affected Properties” =
within 200’ radius of applicant’s
property;
On the same blockface;
On the blockface across the street.

Attracting & Keeping Volunteers

2



Station WIIFM*



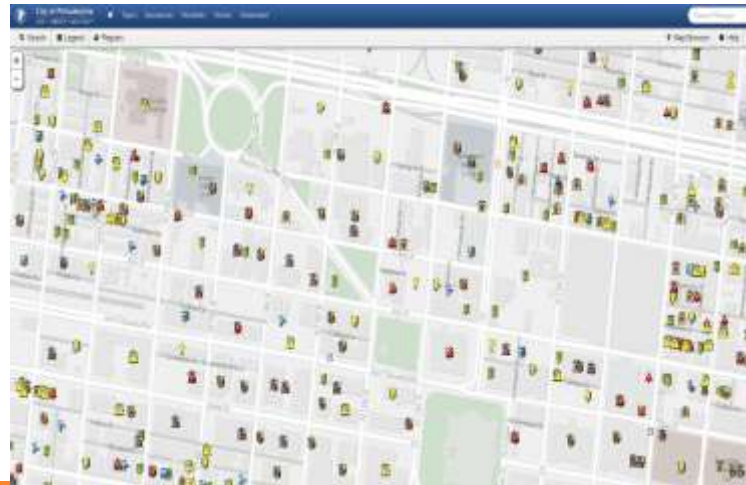
***What's in it for me?**

Graphic Credit: Lisa Whited

Resources & Tools- ZBA Appeals

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- www.phila.gov/li/Pages/default.aspx
- Zoning appeals list- filter under “region” to show council districts
- Click on appeal# to find detailed info about case
- www.phila.gov/map scroll down to “Violations” map



Sample RCO Zoning committee policies and procedures- Comparison Summary

Item of comparison	East Passyunk Crossing Civic Assoc. & Town Watch (EPX)	GENA- Girard Estates Neighbors Association (online)	South Kensington Community Partners (online)	South of South Neighborhood Assoc (SOSNA) (online)
Purpose / Mission:	Planning & zoning committee mission statement; reviews all applications for variance, certificate, CDR, liquor transfer, etc.	Provide a public forum of discussion & review of all zoning variance applications; provide a means for direct neighborhood input	Zoning Committee purpose to facilitate a public forum for discussion and review of zoning variance requests through community vote for all applications...and convey the vote at ZBA hearings for variance requests.	"Zoning Committee Protocols" – provides a public forum for discussion and review of all zoning variances within the SOSNA area; residents can register their opinion on voting sheets forwarded to Councilperson's office
Committee member roles & responsibilities:	Nominated and approved by the Board	Members named; terms, nominated by general membership; approved by Committee	Neutrality; facilitation at zoning meetings; notifications; monitoring projects re: provisos; attend ZBA hearings; non-voting	9-member Committee appointed by SOSNA Board of Directors; Chair & Vice-Chair; term limits; Chair presides & writes opinion
Applicant submission requirements:	List of documents that must be submitted (no deadline)	Submit 2 weeks prior; electronic, if hard copies- (9) copies	Submit 1 week prior to DRC mtg; prefer electronic	List of required documents must be submitted min. 10 days prior to mtg; (6) copies
Decision-making process:	Discussion with opinions of community welcome; straw poll of support or opposition; Committee votes following the public meeting; reviewed by Board	Public comment, Committee deliberates in closed session and votes 4 Positions: Support, Non-Opposition, Deferral, Opposition	Community ballots- 1 per project; 1 vote from DRC; Letter of support, Support with Provisos, Opposition, or Continuance	Attendees (must be resident within area) indicate 'support' or "non-support" on voting sheets; Zoning committee tries to reach consensus on (1) position: Support, Non-opposition, Deferral, Opposition, or No Opinion
Meeting Procedures:	Step by step (all cases)	Step by step (all cases)	Outlined for each type of review process; "Proviso process" - conditions to statements of support;	General "Guidelines"; Committee presides and moderates; option for mediation in the case of "opposition";
Meeting Notification: (first 4 reflect policies prior to March 2014 change in notification to "affected" properties)	5 days prior to meeting, post flyers in prominent locations; email list, EPX operated internet sites	GENA website, newsletter and South Philly Review; coordinate with other RCOs if property within shared boundaries	Website, weekly e-newsletter, monthly zoning e-newsletter; newspapers; flyers posted at project site & public locations; delivered to addresses within 500' of project	Monthly meetings on 3 rd Wednesdays; projects to be reviewed posted on website "events calendar"