OLD CITY.

DESIGN GUIDE

FOR DEVELOPERS, ARCHITECTS, AND ENTREPRENEURS

a VISION 2026 initiative

Vision2026 Values + Aspirations

These overarching goals should inform development and design considerations of private interests and public decision-makers.

Be a **world-class walking** neighborhood

Foster civic life through **great public space**

Re-Occupy vacant buildings and unbuilt parcels

Clarify goals of the neighborhood for developers

Cultivate people: more residents, workers, visitors

Enhance and protect **historic and creative** character

Attract **neighborhood-serving retail** (especially a grocery!)

Connect better to nearby neighborhoods

Encourage **car-free travel** as the first choice of most

independent by design

In December 2015, the Old City District Board of Directors adopted Vision2026. This framework for future public and private investment embraces growth and development, and charts a course for how such growth can not only preserve, but enhance the quality of life and business in Old City.

Vision2026 recommended six Key Next Steps in Planning and Design, the last of which is the subject of this document:

1. Community Planning + Conceptual Design for Christ Church Park
2. Promotion + Improvement of Bus Service on SEPTA's Route 57
3. Development of a Traffic + Curbside Management Plan
4. Traffic Study to Create More Crosswalks
5. Conceptual Design + Fatal Flaw Analysis of 2nd Street Station Plaza
6. Old City Design Guide

Old City is interested in continued preservation and renovation of historic buildings and infill development that adds vitality to our neighborhood. The following pages are designed to provide property owners and developers with guidance regarding how they can make the most of their investments and ensure that the whole of Old City is greater than the sum of its parts.

- Job Itzkowitz, Executive Director
April 2017

Outcomes of Following This Guide:
Enduring Buildings that Generate Value + Support Civic Life

Historic neighborhoods like Old City do not materialize overnight, and while their buildings transcend generations, it is the people that bring them to life. In order to generate long term value, real estate development must consider more than the financial return of the next seven years. Rather, development should build wealth over decades by contributing to the value of neighboring properties. By the same measure, buildings can support civic life by connecting people, providing opportunities for planned and spontaneous meetings, and serving as a backdrop for memories of times well spent.

The Old City Design Guide is meant as a reference for property owners, developers, architects, and shopfront entrepreneurs. It is not intended as a regulatory document,but rather a tool for those invested in Old City. This Design Guide begins with a presentation of the types of development opportunities available in Old City and an outline of the policy positions of the Old City District in its role as Registered Community Organization, which weighs in on projects requesting variances or special exception permits. After a presentation of four development imperatives and guidelines for new buildings, shopfront design, and curbside options, it concludes with a summary of the most applicable zoning regulations and some other especially useful design guides.

The Design Guide introduces four imperatives, or principles, that should be considered by any and all property improvement. Thereafter, it describes the critical characteristics of new buildings meant to fit into Old City, and storefront design that enlivens the street. The latter should be considered by new construction and renovation alike, by property owners and tenants.

How this Guide is Organized

Why A Design Guide?
Growth Brings Change,
Opportunity, and Risk to Old City

Old City is a wonderful place to live, visit, and do business.

More and more people are realizing this, and that means there is increased investment in the neighborhood resulting in more feet on the street, the rehabilitation of underutilized buildings, and proposals for development on unbuilt lots. While this is absolutely a positive trend, growth that takes place in the wrong way - demolition of historic buildings, construction of new ones out of character with the neighborhood, increased vehicular traffic, or unaffordable rents - carries its own risks. On the other hand, if new development takes place the right way, it can further enrich the qualities that make Old City so wonderful, and make them accessible to even more people.

inspirational character

gaps in the urban fabric

underutilized property

craftsmanship in renovation

Opportunity

A real estate market assessment, conducted in 2015 by Urban Partners as part of the Old City Vision2026 process, confirmed what many anecdotally know to be true: Old City is hot.

Given the current rate of development, it is reasonable to conclude that 200 to 300 residential units could be added to Old City annually for the foreseeable future. This growth in housing, representing 10% to 15% of Center City growth, would result in an additional 300 to 450 new Old City residents per year. While the potential population growth may appear to be unlimited, it is a matter of pace. Using a ten-year horizon, population might grow from the current 4,000 to a 7,000 to 8,500 range if sites are available. With regard to retail, the current total demand for new space for Old City is approximately 140,000 square feet, occupying a total of approximately 40 new stores of typical square footage. Most of this retail demand could fill a portion of the existing 70+ vacant ground floor spaces.

This market dynamic creates three distinct opportunities:

### Responsible Infill Development on Unbuilt Parcels
Most unbuilt parcels in Old City are currently used for surface parking. Many have development proposals already, and while the impacts of shrinking parking supply ought not be understated, development should be welcome on other remaining parcels.

Restoration and/or Increased Use of Existing Buildings
Vacancy in Old City has been steadily declining, but some unoccupied buildings and storefronts remain. Nearly all should be restored and repopulated.

TO BE AVOIDED: Demolition of Existing Historic Structures
As a recently named World Heritage City by UNESCO, Philadelphia's built environment is more important than ever. Demolition of historic buildings should be avoided, and buildings should not be purchased with the assumption that they can be demolished and replaced with a larger modern building.
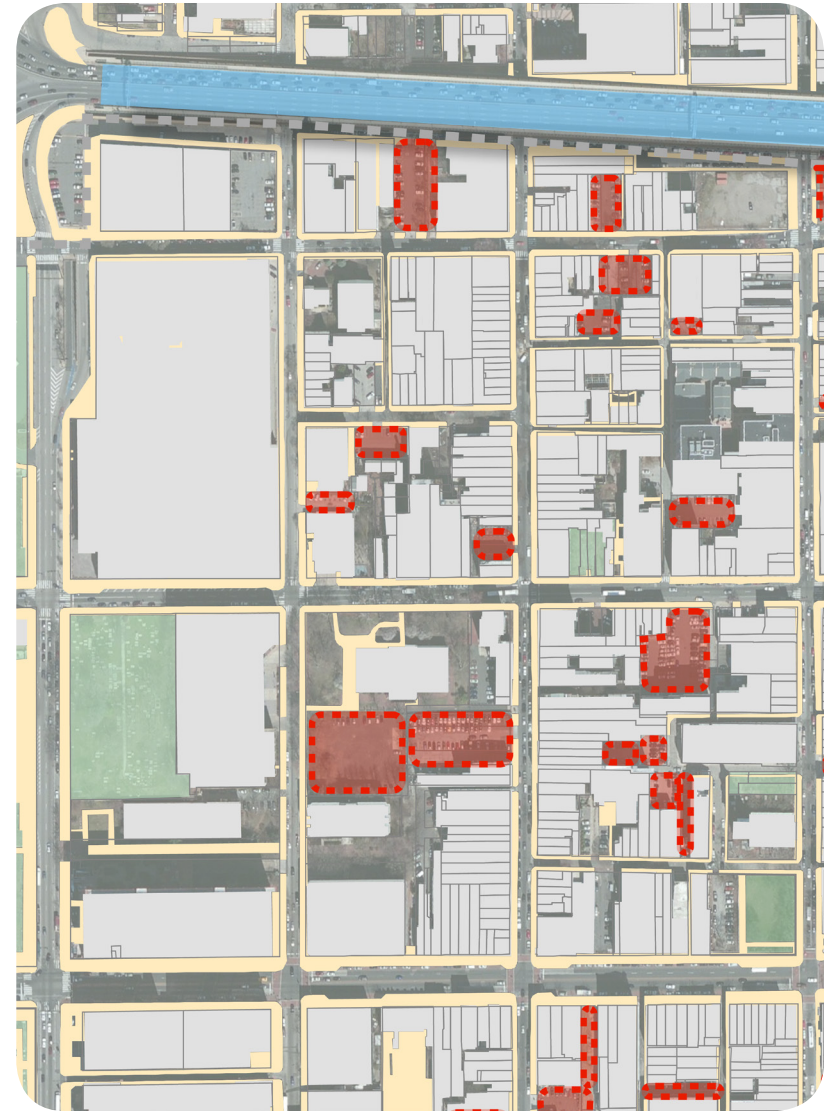
Unbuilt Lots in Old City

Old City RCO + Variance Requests: the "Civic Checklist"

Zoning regulations set the basic rules of the road for development in Philadelphia, and are established by the Philadelphia Planning Commission and City Council. A summary of these rules is included at the end of this publication.

Often, however, proposed developments may request variances or special exceptions if the Department of Licenses and Inspections deems them not permissible by-right, pursuant to the zoning code. These requests, which are ultimately granted or refused by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA), trigger a meeting with the local Registered Community Organization (RCO). After evaluating the merits and impacts of these projects, the **RCO may provide a position letter to the ZBA, recommending approval or refusal of the developer's request for variance or special exception**. Old City District serves as the RCO for most of Old City and is registered by the Planning Commission in that capacity.

During the Vision2026 process, the **Old City District developed a "Civic Checklist" to more clearly communicate community values** internally and to developers, designers,and property owners. This checklist is designed as a reference tool for RCO project review meetings, providing positive and negative criteria in assessing each topic. Key elements of the "civic checklist" are summarized on the next page; a full copy may be obtained from the Old City District.

Developers, architects and property owners are encouraged to consider these general policy positions as they begin planning their projects and considering requests for variances and special exceptions.

Building Height (variance request)

Typically, requests to build above the limit should not be supported.

The architecture of the district is defined largely by mixed-use "loft" buildings meant to be occupied in a variety of ways, often with ground floor workshops and storefronts and over-the-shop dwellings, production floors, or warehouse space above. Most were built before elevators were common, so the typical 3-6 story height is partially the result of how high the upper floor can be if it is to be accessed daily by stairs. Whereas opportunities for additional height have been created by the Bridge Overlay and additional height limits do not apply south of Market Street, The Old City Residential Area Overlay (see Helpful Reference Tools section) height limit of 65′ ensures that future development with modern technology does not compromise the comfortable scale of the streets in the traditional "core."

Parking Minimums (variance request)

Requests to roll back minimum parking requirements should usually be supported by the RCO.

CMX-3 requires residential projects to provide a minimum of 3 spaces per 10 units, but recognizes that office and retail users will travel by other modes, park on street, or park at one of the area commercial garages. However, Vision2026 suggests that in practice, negative consequences are more likely to be inflicted by the increased provision of off-street parking than by its exclusion, and that the RCO's default position should be to support variance requests to provide less parking than required, including none at all.

Lot Coverage + Setbacks (variance request)

Typically, requests to exceed coverage should not be supported.

Lot coverage and setback regulations are intended to ensure that occupants of adjacent buildings have access to light and air. As a steward of that public good, projects seeking to exceed permitted coverage resulting in diminished access to light and air should not be supported. Alternatively, a project for which the additional coverage would have no adverse effect should be considered on its merits.

Loading Operations (variance request)

Evaluate requests to reduce required loading bays case-by-case; loading docks can be more disruptive than their exclusion.

In Old City, each block hosts many businesses and/or residents that share an interest in the "asset" of curbside space that must be designed and managed to accommodate a combination of parking, loading, trash pickup, dining, stormwater management, meters, lighting, trees, bike lanes, and bus stops. Loading operations should be as efficient and as safe as possible, and large buildings are required to provide off-street loading to avoid overwhelming the street; review of requests will consider the trade-off between the scale of a building and its burden on the street.

Food-Related Uses (special exception request)

All measures to avoid negative externalities should be taken.

Though not as urgent a topic as it once was, and though it may be difficult to demonstrate that impacts will rise to the level required to deny Special Exception Approval, it is important to acknowledge that given Old City's compact, connected nature, potential nuisances such as fumes from the grill, odd-hour deliveries, noise from exhaust fans, or odor/vermin spreading from trash storage areas have immediate impact on near neighbors.

Four Imperatives for Building in Old City

The purpose of following this guide is to **make the ordinary great**, not by encouraging buildings to be "gold-plated," but by instilling in them the simple characteristics that can be learned, repeated, and earn our affection. Everyday buildings should add up a to a whole that will be worthy of protecting from demolition in the future, even if no individual building would be on its own. This guide is not for monuments or civic buildings, but the economic buildings that make up most of our daily experiences. These four imperatives, accompanied by drawings from *The Architecture of Community* by Leon Krier, include:

1. Build for 100 years

2. Build harmonious variety

3. Build a street, not only a building

4. Build for people

Build for 100+ Years 1st Imperative

Old City is one of the most significant historic places in not only Philadelphia, but all of America. The neighborhood has attained this status for the simple reason that its buildings are built to last, and they last because of three basic factors:

Sturdiness to endure. Some materials last longer than others; some construction techniques provide less long-term stability than others. By selecting building materials and construction techniques that remain solid for not years, but decades (with proper maintenance), Old City buildings are passed down from generation to generation.

Flexibility to evolve. The highest and best use of buildings changes over time: industry, retail, offices, residential dwelling, etc. A building unable to accommodate new uses will be more likely to sit vacant or be torn down. When designed to be able to adapt to a variety of configurations, buildings will withstand the inevitable shifts of the market.

Beauty to protect. In short, buildings that are beloved are not torn down as often as those unearning of affection. By going beyond their utilitarian purposes and building structures that earn the love of the community, they appreciate in long-term value and remain for generations to enjoy.

Too often, building for only the current investment cycle yields buildings that will not last 100 years, or be worth preserving. Taking a longer term perspective will add to what makes Old City special.

credit: Leon Krier

credit: Leon Krier
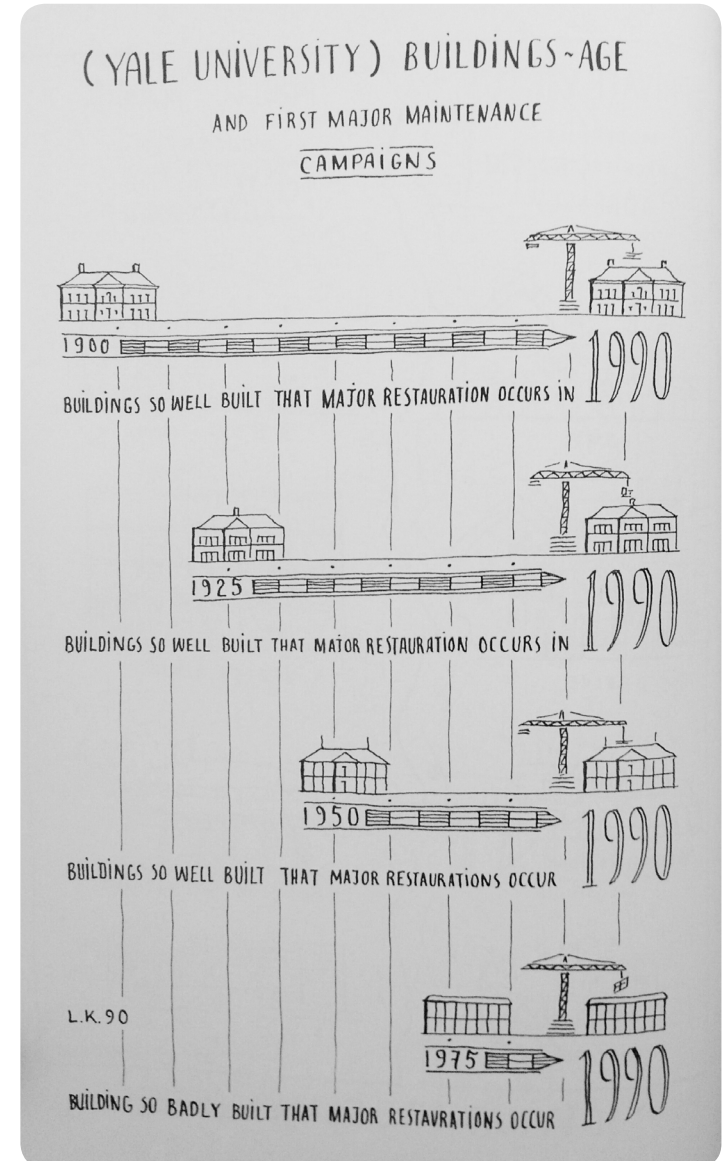
2nd Imperative Build Harmonious Variety

This imperative may sound like an oxymoron, but it is the result of generations of building in Old City. Upholding that tradition is essential to preserving the neighborhood's character as it welcomes new growth in the coming years. When adding a building to a block, this Design Guide requires builders and designers to make three considerations:

Distinguish between civic and economic buildings. In addition to streets and public spaces, city neighborhoods are composed of two types of buildings: civic and economic. The latter includes shops, offices, manufacturers, apartments, galleries, etc; the former includes churches, museums, libraries, and other significant public institutions. These civic buildings should stand out from the crowd, as they represent the community's highest ideals.

Create continuity, not dissonance. Economic buildings, however, should generally blend together when observed from a distance. While they should be built with care to inspire affection and joy, if they are designed with too strong a departure from the rest, they necessarily distract from both the street scene and any more significant civic buildings. They should not vary so much that the block becomes a cacophony of fashion, proportion, and scale.

Generate rhythm, not repetition. In spite of this continuity, Old City streets are not a series of one building copied and repeated down the block; their buildings vary in height, width, material, and overall composition. These blocks generate a harmony through a certain amount of consistency and rhythm, however messy, within their variation. As such, when considering the height, width, materials, or composition of a new building, it is not enough to ask if it matches its immediate neighbor. A carbon copy and a wild departure may be equally unwelcome in Old City. The question is: does a new building fall, generally, within the spectrum presented in the block?

THE ARCHITECTURE OF COMMUNITY

HOUSE

HOUSES

LK 82

HOUSING

268

credit: Leon Krier
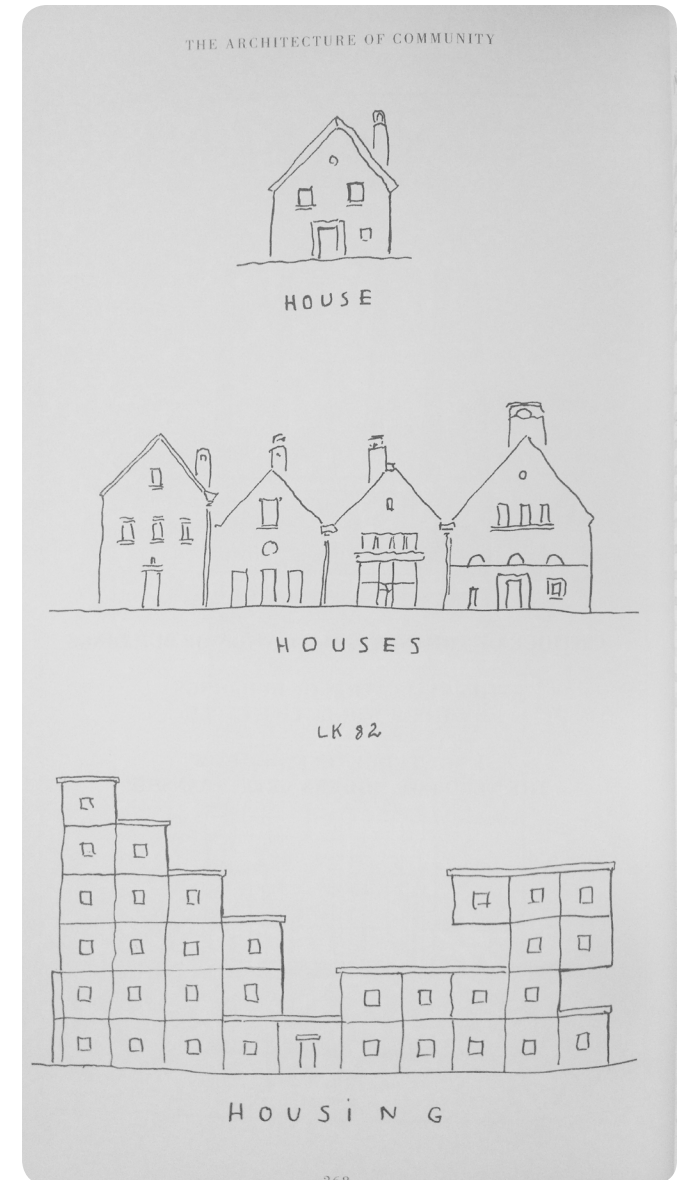
Build a Street, Not Only a Building 3rd Imperative

The street is not only how people get to where they are going, but the place they interact, and the means by which they develop an impression and opinion of a neighborhood.

The street is a volume. While it includes a surface, the street comprises three dimensions, not two. Buildings, much more than its roadway surface, create the street's reason for existence, its edges, and its animation and character. A roadway built of the finest materials but with dull or disorienting buildings lining it would result in a street that endears itself to no one; a street built of the most mundane materials but featuring buildings that generate life will be widely sought as a place to live, work, and visit.

Location carries responsibility. It is the responsibility of the builder to consider the three-dimensional public life that their project will or will not generate. In this regard, "place" matters. Old City's primary streets - 2nd, 3rd, Chestnut, Market, Arch, and Race - are its most public, and should have district-wide expectations for consistency of character. Smaller streets - Bread, Cherry, Filbert, Letitia, etc. - are more private in nature. On such streets, developers should focus outreach on immediate neighbors on the block, as they are more substantially impacted by development than the neighborhood as a whole. As streets like Church, Letitia, and Bank evolve as commercial streets with a more public presence, they ought to also raise their level of expectation with regard to district-wide character.
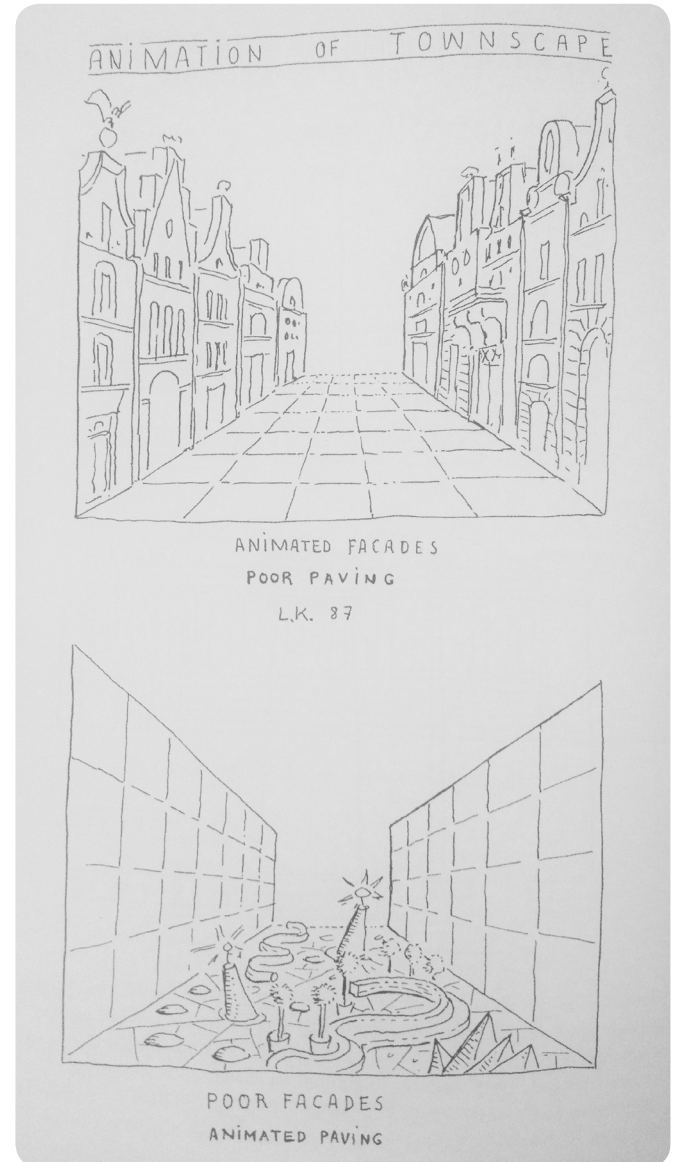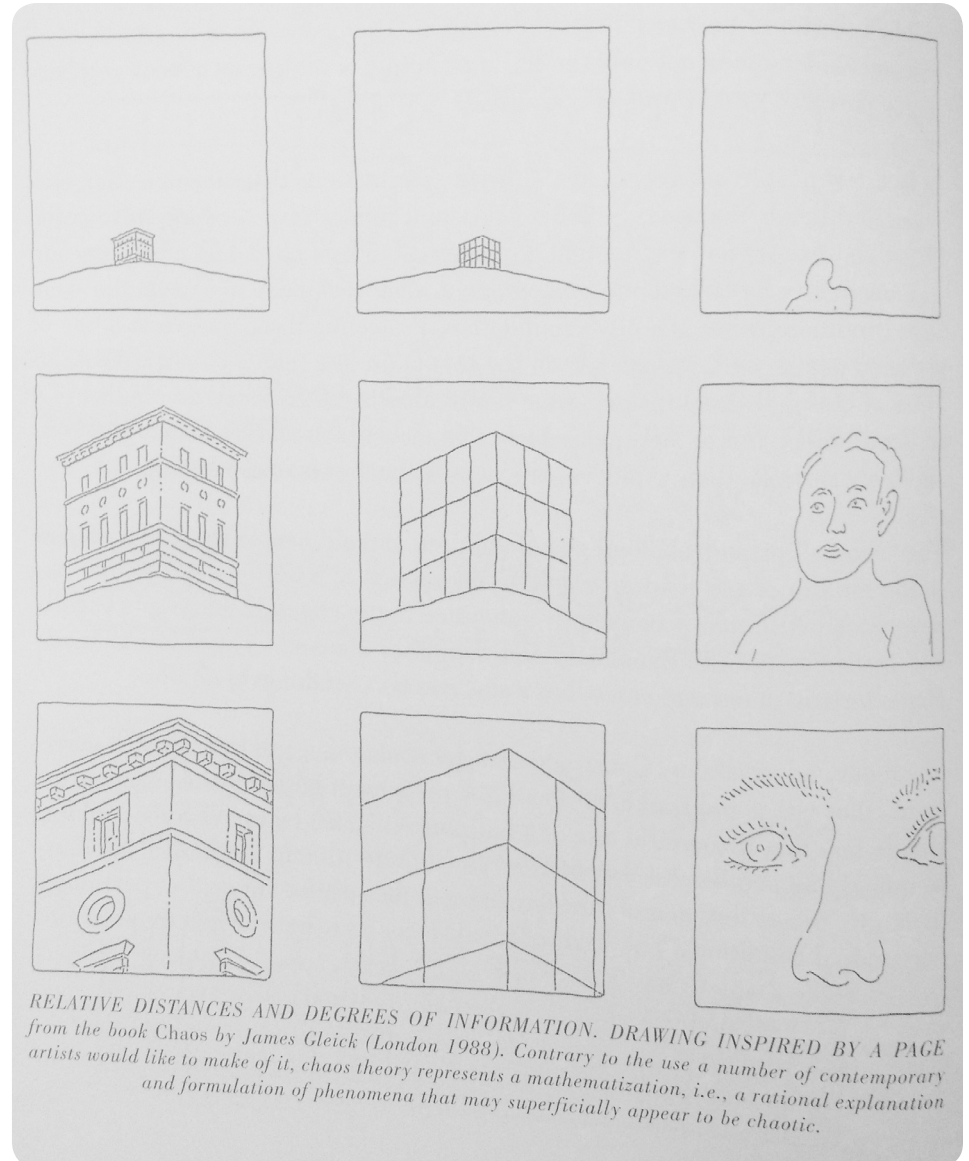

credit: Leon Krier

4ᵗʰ Imperative Build for People

The "human scale" of a building has little to do with its size. Rather, this scale has to do with proportion, symmetry, and the way larger masses of a building are broken down.

Reference patterns and ratios found in nature because elements are organized in such a manner intuitive to people interacting with the building. We subconsciously recognize these patterns, and their use makes people feel comfortable, ultimately developing affection for places they create. Individual buildings in Old City ought to be not monolithic in appearance, but visibly composed of rationally organized elements at intuitive scales and ratios. This imperative can be achieved across the spectrum of architectural styles.

Use walking as the "design vehicle." Human scale also impacts the size and composition of the neighborhood. Old City was built around people's walking capabilities. This constraint limited buildings to about five stories in height, a defining characteristic of Old City. It also helps define the neighborhood as limited by how far one can comfortably walk in five to ten minutes. Finally, moving through space at high speeds gradually influences building design to defy human scale; signage along every suburban arterial in the country is proof of that. However, when built around walking, elements of architecture and urban design should be at a finer grain. Without becoming so tiny that they are overly challenging to rent, shopfronts should be relatively narrow (with their area determined by their depth), so that a walk down the street provides many unique offerings, with a scenery that shifts every few steps; signage should be designed for the approaching pedestrian; buildings should reveal interesting details and materials as they are approached on foot.

RELATIVE DISTANCES AND DEGREES OF INFORMATION. DRAWING INSPIRED BY A PAGE from the book Chaos by James Gleick (London 1988). Contrary to the use a number of contemporary artists would like to make of it, chaos theory represents a mathematization, i.e., a rational explanation and formulation of phenomena that may superficially appear to be chaotic.

credit: Leon Krier

New Buildings

Buildings and their elements add up to create blocks of a neighborhood. As parking lots created in the 20th century cease to be the highest and best use of property in Old City, developers are replacing them with apartments, shops, and offices that fill in gaps in the urban fabric. It is important that these new buildings add to the quality of life and enrich the Old City experience rather than diminish it. This guide focuses on five essential topics for doing so.

1. Frame the street

2. Create vertical proportion and street rhythm

*3. Do not preclude retail on primary streets*

4. Prioritize people over cars

5. Compose buildings and their elements with familiar patterns and enduring materials

New Buildings: Building a Better Block

Frame The Street

Maintain the Street Line. Old City buildings, almost without exception, are set to the street line. Such placement maintains the integrity of the street as a "room" and prevents uncomfortable "dead spaces" around corners of buildings.

Building height varies on Old City streets, but generally creates a nearly 1:1 ratio with the width of the street. 2nd and 3rd Streets, for example, are 48 feet wide from building face to building face, and buildings typically rise between 30 and 60 feet. This 1:1 ratio is considered "ideal" by many experts on great urban places, and should be repeated by new buildings in the neighborhood. Precise consistency with neighboring structures is not critical.

credit:

Atkin Olshin Schade Architects

64'

20'

24'

48'
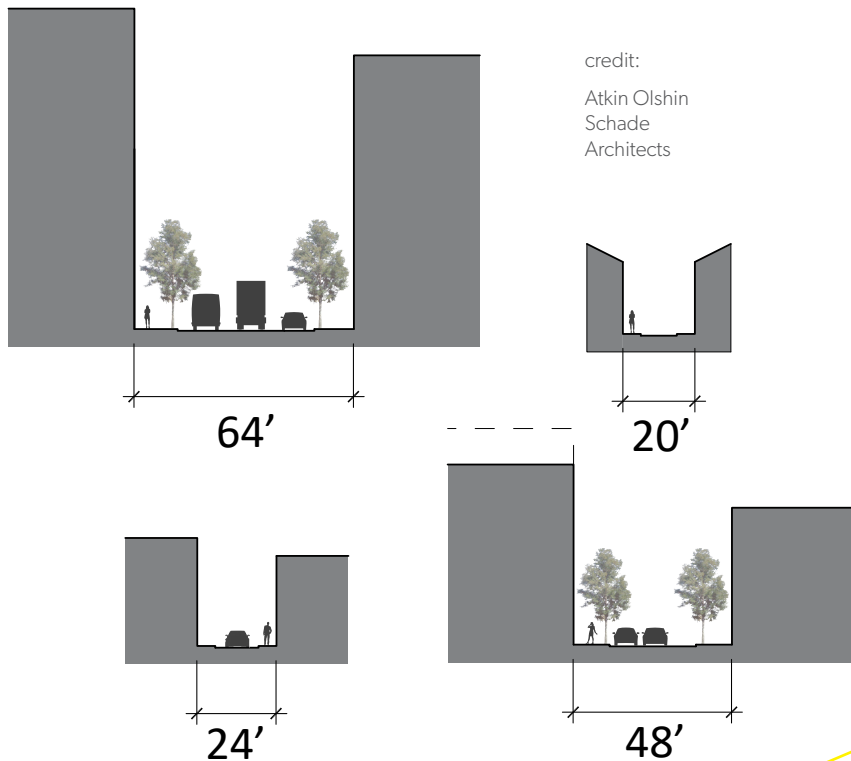
Constrain Horizontal Elements to Create Vertical Proportion and Street Rhythm

Relatively narrow building frontage. Traditionally, the width of buildings in Old City was limited by the weight-bearing capacity of wood beams and joists. As a result, buildings are typically between 18 and 35 feet wide. This dimension combines with the aforementioned height to create an overall vertical proportion and provides a stimulating environment in which a person passes by a new storefront or entry every few paces.

Despite evolution in construction technology that allows for wider spans, it is important to continue constraining the width of buildings and storefronts to create vertical proportion and pedestrian interest. If a large site is to be built upon, either several buildings should be considered to span its width, or one building should be broken down in such a way as to reflect the character of Old City.

70'

46'

53'

34'

21'

16'

48'

2nd Street dimensions (image: Google Street View)

Do Not Preclude Retail on Primary Streets

Old City is a mixed-use district, in many ways defined by its first floor activity. CMX-3 zoning does not require ground floor retail, but commerce is essential to the character of the neighborhood's most public streets - 2nd, 3rd, Chestnut, Market, Arch, and Race.

Work with the (future) market. Market demand for retail uses does not always match the supply that Old City can provide, and there is a tendency to design and build only for the current market. For example: in eras when retail demand is weak, but residential demand remains strong, ground floors are often designed for residential use. Such a decision can inadvertently preclude future conversion to retail use during stronger market conditions, thereby stymieing the future while only considering the present. One of the best ways to prevent this unfortunate outcome is to build a 15-foot first floor, even when the immediate use is planned to be residential. This first floor can be converted to retail use when market forces for it prevail.

If too much of the 1st floor is dedicated to circulation, and retail space is too shallow, even otherwise competent projects can cause a street to fall short of its potential.

image credit: JKRP Architects

A variation on that scenario: When designing a new "mixed use" building with a pro forma driven by residential rent or sales, the circulation needs of the upper floors often cannibalize precious space on the ground floor, leaving comparably little for retail frontage, and if the building is shallow, very little for productive retail floor space. Potential commercial space initially dedicated to circulation for those living or working above is unlikely to be re-purposed for retail; residential or corporate lobbies are not blank walls, but have a similar dulling effect.

Today's developers and architects need to develop creative solutions to prevent this from happening. Failure to do so will undermine the very street life that makes Old City so appealing in the first place.

Short-sighted design can make first floors difficult to re-purpose.

New Buildings: Building a Better Block

Prioritize People Over Cars

Parking is not necessary to bring a site into productive use, contrary to common belief. It may be so in exurban areas, suburbs, or even other Philadelphia neighborhoods, but not in Old City, which is so rich with walking, bicycling, and various transit. Furthermore, the Vision2026 process identified significant concerns about development leading to more motor traffic in the neighborhood.

Provision of parking can often diminish the quality of life in a neighborhood. Curb cuts (new or old, but especially on primary streets) interrupt the walking experience and create opportunities for vehicle/pedestrian conflict; more heavily trafficked streets are less safe and enjoyable to walk about, and provision of parking is one of the leading predictors of increased driving, which Old City residents and businesses generally believe will diminish the neighborhood's quality of life.
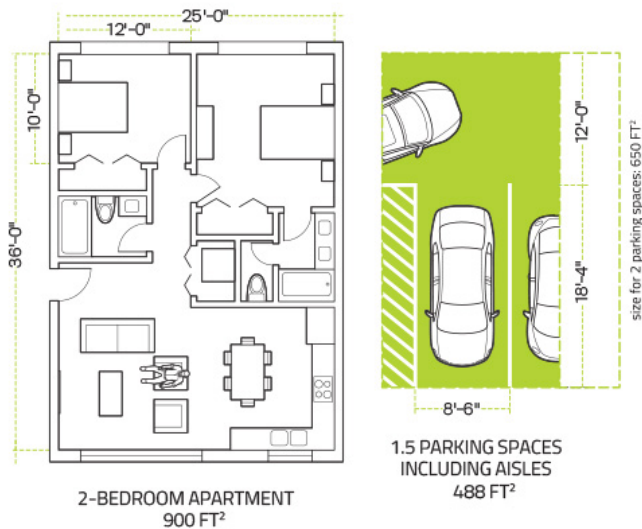
With height and coverage limits in place, space dedicated to parking diminishes the number of residents able to live in Old City.

image credit: Mother Jones
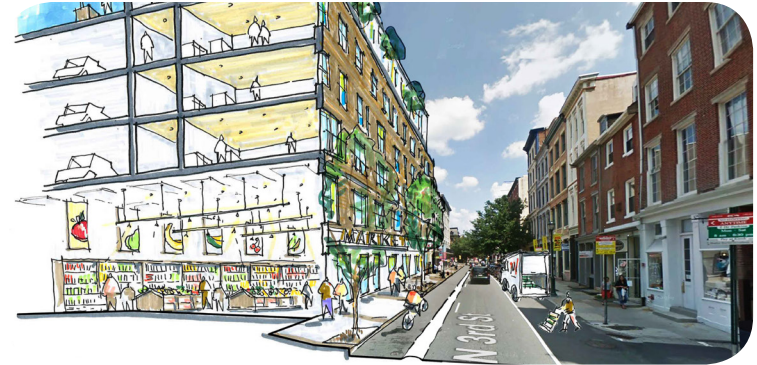
Hiding parking behind active uses diminishes some of negative impacts, but not all of them.
image credit: Atkin Olshin Schade Architects

Parking comes with significant opportunity cost, especially given Old City's building height limit and the resulting limited buildable envelope. Garages occupy space that could otherwise be filled with residences or businesses - each parking space requires about 350 square feet, compared to 150 square feet per person of office space or a 500 square foot studio apartment. Private parking also comes at the direct expense of the opportunity for publicly available parking.

Furthermore, parking is often associated with very large units (3,000-5,000 square feet), the urban version of McMansions, which often do require parking to be financed and sold. Such residences preclude larger numbers of residents in more reasonably sized residences. *For example: ten 4,000 square foot townhouses and their necessary parking occupy the same real estate that could be occupied by thirty households in units without parking, averaging 1,500 square feet.*

Therefore, if the parking of a proposed project is expected to adversely impact the quality of Old City, its inclusion should be reconsidered, by shifting to a less parking-dependent program.

Old City District's 'civic checklist' aims to **reduce entitlement risk** faced by developers interested in providing less parking than the zoning code requires by **formalizing the RCO position** that "*Requests to roll back minimum parking requirements should usually be granted.*"

Compose Buildings and their Elements with Familiar Patterns and Enduring Materials.

Bottom: heavy but transparent. The base of Old City buildings, especially mixed-use ones on the neighborhood's primary streets, offer a bit of a paradox. On the one hand, they are constructed of heavy materials - traditionally stone, cast iron, or even concrete. On the other, they include a relatively high degree of transparency, even if less than the most modern storefronts. The glass of windows and doors is of large individual pieces. The ground floor, as a whole, is not flat; it offers a high degree of three dimensionality, sometimes supplementing the heavy structural material with ornamental wood detailing.

Middle: lighter but more private. Above, the middle of a building is composed of a more finely articulated material - usually brick, but also often various cut stone. The articulation of the selected material allows it to feel lighter than the more monolithic material used in the building's base. These materials occupy more surface area than the heavy materials used in the base of the building. Windows occupy less surface area than on the ground floor, creating a balance between views and privacy. They line up with each other vertically and horizontally, (though not necessarily with the building next door) and are punched into the surface, creating depth, but not as much as the ground floor. These windows, like other building elements, also have a bottom, middle, and top; they tend to be operable in nature, horizontal in proportion, and comprise smaller individual panes than the large windows at the base of the building.

Top: completing the composition. Traditional Old City buildings use cornices to keep rainwater away from the walls. These cornices are better known to the layperson for their often ornamental design, often referencing the ornamentation at the base of the building. However, whether plain or ornate, the cornice lends the building a distinct "top," making it feel much more complete than if the material of the middle abruptly met the open sky.

These core features can be created in a variety of architectural styles, ranging from the traditional to the modern.

Shopfront Design

Neighborhoods like Old City bustle because they are interesting places that people love to be. This interest is not only a result of the products and services shops offer, but the sidewalk experience that they create. That experience is the nexus of design and human psychology.

This section provides guidance about storefront features that create interest and value. It may be applied to new construction, or improvement of existing storefronts.

1. Storefront elevation

2. The shop-to-roadway cross-section

3. Creative elements to enhance a shopfront

Storefront Elevation

1600 Block of Walnut: NOT the Old City aesthetic

Example of typical Old City shopfront composition

Storefront Composition

The typical traditional Old City building, ranging between 15 and 35 feet in width, often accommodates multiple entrances - one for upstairs, one for the shop, and sometimes one for the basement on the sidewalk. These multiple entries keep the frontage active, and care is given to make sure the upstairs entrance does not dominate or take away from the display of the retail space.

Unlike many newer retail districts where a higher ratio of window to frame is appropriate, Old City's shopfronts are more reserved, often not exceeding 50% glazing on the ground floor.

However, this comparable lack of transparency is made approachable and avoids becoming dull by breaking down the storefront into distinct components. Storefronts up to 30-feet wide are typically organized into vertical sections, including windows that only begin about two or three feet off the ground.

Example of typical Old City shopfront transparency

Example of variable Old City shopfront style

Transparency + Display

Windows are the portal between the sidewalk and the shop or restaurant inside. It should remain easy to see the activity going on inside. While stencil lettering may be appropriate,the glass should remain free of obstructions such as posters or substantial paint.

Though covering windows with advertising is inappropriate, every opportunity should be taken to display the interesting wares of a shop, or dining patrons enjoying themselves.

Design Style

Though a plurality of Old City buildings dates to the 19th century and earlier, storefront design need not be limited to the styles of those periods. Modern architecture that follows the core principles of urban design in Old City can add the variety that keeps the neighborhood interesting.

The Shop-to-Roadway Cross-Section

Eye-Catching Zone

In Old City, the property line often sits about four feet in front of the exterior wall. This space often provides basement access through a hatchway or is elevated a few inches above the sidewalk with a stone threshold. This transitional space between the interior and exterior of a building is an opportunity to invite passersby inside by deploying seating, plantings, or signage on the ground, or projecting an awning or signage above. The design of this area is often what catches people's eye, and should be carefully considered.

Amenity Strip

The edge of the sidewalk is where utilities, street lights, trees, parking meters, and bike racks are typically located. Provided they do not unnecessarily constrain the walking space, this may be an appropriate space for seating or sandwich boards, where they are legal.

Stroll Zone

The City of Philadelphia requires sidewalks of the type found on Old City's retail streets to keep either six feet or half the width of the sidewalk clear for walking. As neighborhoods draw more residents, workers, and visitors, walking space has a tendency to be squeezed. In order to continue providing a high quality of pedestrian life in Old City, it will be important to provide space for pedestrians to comfortably pass one another on the sidewalk. If other uses, like dining and display begin to expand beyond the amenity strip or eye-catching zone and inhibit this comfort, they should consider either being curtailed, or shifted to other locations like the vitality support lane.

Vitality Support Lane

When the curbside lane is not dedicated to travel, it is often used for parking or loading. However, there are increasing circumstances in which the curbside may be better utilized as a transit stop, bicycle parking, or public space known as a "parklet." These are all options for how to best support the vitality of the street, and should be discussed by stakeholders on the block.

Travel Lane

Old City streets typically have one or two travel lanes. These lanes may be mixed traffic or dedicated to bicyclists or transit. They should not be encroached upon by any building amenities. Motorists have a legal obligation to yield to pedestrians at all marked and unmarked crosswalks. During car-free or #openstreets events, this space should be kept clear for pedestrians and bicyclists, and the entire sidewalk may be populated with cafe space and retail displays.

Display Interior

The first 10-20 feet of a storefront are critical for drawing visitors inside and should be considered an opportunity to do so with attractive displays. For restaurants, this is the area that should benefit from doors and windows that can open during comfortable weather and seasons, blending with the outdoor space.

Interior Space

The majority of seating and inventory exists deeper within shops and restaurants. This space completes the experience, but is dependent on a good first impression and not vice versa.

TRAVEL	VITALITY	AMENITY	STROLL	EYE-CATCHING	DISPLAY	INTERIOR
LANE	SUPPORT LANE	STRIP	ZONE	ZONE	INTERIOR	SPACE

Creative Elements to Enhance a Shopfront

Streets, and the storefronts composing them, come to life because of many individual elements that provide comfort for the body and stimulation for the mind. Entrepreneurs should work together with their landlords to make sure that retail space fit out is not limited to the building interior, but fully considers the sidewalk experience. The fundamental benefit of urban environments, which distinguishes them from their suburban counterparts, is all the foot traffic, and these are the elements that help draw in curious passersby, and ultimately build a neighborhood's identity. Contact Old City District about grant opportunities to improve shopfronts.

Shade from Sun and Cover from Weather

As much as people love a bright sunny day, shade can be a valuable amenity that can reduce glare and heat, in addition to protecting from the elements. Shade devices should not be permanent, only deployed when necessary, such as umbrellas or functional awnings.

13th Street

Projecting Signs (crafted, not mass produced)

Projecting signs alert pedestrians to a shop's presence before they arrive at the front door, having almost already passed by. They also create a visually stimulating streetscape.

Such signage, in addition to following existing sign regulations, works best customized and produced by hand. It may be illuminated, but should not be lit from within. Such signage is subject to review by the Philadelphia Art Commission and the Historical Commission.

North 3rd Street

Light at Night

By the same token that people appreciate shade in the bright sun, a well-lit streetscape remains attractive when night falls. In addition to traditional street lights, this light is provided by the warm glow within a shop or restaurant, but also the possibility of intimate lighting of the pedestrian realm.

South 3rd Street

Lush Greenery

Even in the city, people are drawn to nature. Bringing plants to the window or sidewalk of a storefront creates interest, softening the threshold and inviting people in.

North 2nd Street

Sandwich Boards

As of this publication, sandwich boards are illegal in Philadelphia, and when deployed poorly, they can, indeed, be a nuisance. However, in localities where legal, well-deployed sandwich boards add interest to a retail district, in addition to providing useful promotional information. In addition to being kept out of the direct walkway, they should always be handwritten, and redrawn on a regular basis. Retail or restaurant staff with artistic inclinations can really make this pop.

South Street

Open Up Those Windows!

Transparency is critical to retail and restaurant vitality, and when weather permits, open air is even better than glass.

New buildings with storefronts that can open up to the sidewalk, or retrofits of existing storefronts that maintain the historic integrity are capable of combining the energy of the sidewalk with the activity inside.

Locust Street

Outdoor Seating

By now, the case for outdoor dining has been well-documented. However, outdoor seating should not be limited to restaurants. Just as shopping malls know that patrons stay longer if they have the opportunity to rest once in a while, retail districts like Old City would benefit from more public seating.

Bainbridge Street

Curbside Options

All too often, we assign disproportionate priority to the transportation functions of our streets. Complete streets, however, also serve the social and economic needs of a community. Furthermore, as Old City increases in population and residents and businesses express concern about quality of life being diminished by increased vehicular traffic, it will be important to prioritize commercial loading over private parking, and make walking and biking as pleasurable, safe, and convenient as possible.

1. Outdoor cafes

2. Sidewalk seating

3. Parklets

Outdoor Cafes, Sidewalk Seating, and Parklets

Storefront-Adjacent Cafe Seating

Cafe seating is often located adjacent to the building, as an extension of the restaurant within. This approach lends itself to bistro tables and chairs, and may be shaded either by umbrellas or an awning. For buildings with an elevated threshold in the "eye-catching zone" this is certainly where cafe seating should be located, in order to prevent the walkway from becoming uncomfortably narrow. Interested establishments should submit a Sidewalk Cafe Permit Application, and those intending to serve alcohol must be permitted by the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board.

credit: CJ Dawson Photography

Curbside Cafe Seating

Cafe seating can also be located along the curbside. This arrangement creates a slightly different experience, in which pedestrians have an increased sense that they are walking through the excitement as they walk down the sidewalk. In this case, bistro tables and chairs may be shaded with umbrellas, but care must be taken to avoid encroachment into the cartway. If the "eye-catching zone" of the building features an elevated threshold, this placement would narrow the walkway, and be inappropriate. Interested establishments should submit a Sidewalk Cafe Permit Application, and those intending to serve alcohol must be permitted by the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board.

Market Street

What About Both Locations?

Seating means revenue, and as cafes become more successful, there is a natural temptation to add as much outdoor seating as possible. Unfortunately, cafe seating on both sides of the walkway on Old City's typical 12-foot sidewalks often makes the sidewalk too narrow for people walking in opposite directions to comfortably pass, and should therefore be avoided. Market Street, however, has sufficiently generous sidewalks for seating on both sides.

13th Street in Midtown Village

Non-Cafe Seating

Public seating lets seniors rest when they need to. It provides an opportunity for parents to regroup their children before shopping more. When two people shop together and one does not want to go into a store, that person can take a seat to call a friend, read a book, or check their Twitter. During any one of these situations, a well-positioned bench creates an opportunity for window shopping.
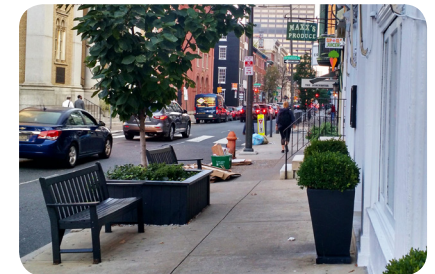
20th Street near Rittenhouse Square

Retail districts like Old City should learn from suburban malls and increase their public seating. Near Rittenhouse Square, Twenty Manning Grill installed a bench that provides a terrific neighborhood amenity. Such installations require an act of City Council, the application for which can be found in Plan Review Checklist No. 4 of the Philadelphia Streets Deptartment.

Establishing a Parklet

Philadelphia has a formal program by which to create and transform curbside parking into space for people, which has been successfully utilized in the Italian Market, Chinatown, South Street, and other commercial corridors. Parklets may be created by an individual business, but often work best when a consortium of neighbors plan for it together.

Though parklets must be open to the general public and not cordoned off for private use, they often provide additional seating space for restaurants. With this in mind, they can serve as a strong alternative to encroaching on the "stroll zone" of the sidewalk by excessively increasing the amount of cafe space.
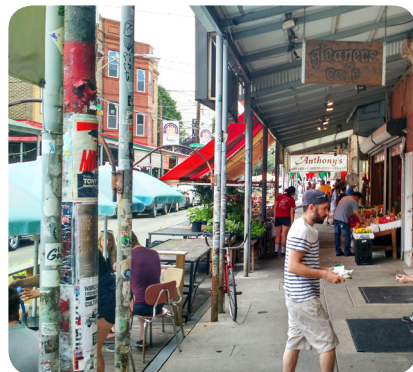
University City (credit: UCD)

One limitation to owners interested in extending restaurant space is that service of liquor would require sign-off by the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board.

A permit application for a parklet can be downloaded here.

Italian Market

Give it a Trial Run on Park(ing) Day

Eliminating on-street parking with a parklet is a big decision. As with many urban design issues, one of the best things you can do is test the idea with a temporary installation. If it doesn't work, don't make it permanent.

Park(ing) Day is a world-wide event started in San Francisco ten years ago, held annually on the third Friday in September. Dozens of Philadelphia organizations participate every year, though participants are typically limited to community groups and various design firms. However, nothing prevents a shop or restaurant from joining in on the fun. Learn more at www.parkingdayphila.org.

Indy Hall + Old City District

Market Street, Old City (bench by Engineering & Land Planning Associates)

Concluding Considerations

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed cataclysmic changes in Old City. National economic forces shifting away from cities coincided with technological changes influencing transportation, building, and design. These factors led to collapsing values in cities and a built environment that was increasingly designed on a larger and larger scale, moving away from centuries of city-building tradition. In Old City, this meant highways, demolition of "obsolete buildings," their replacement with mega-block projects, and surface parking where buildings no longer made economic sense.

Today, as America is in the midst of an urban renaissance evidenced by rising values in cities like Philadelphia, property owners and developers have the opportunity to build on the history of Old City and solidify it as a neighborhood that succeeds because it puts the needs of people first.

The Old City Design Guide is a reference for those interested in creating value and building a neighborhood that is beloved today, and will continue to be worth preserving in the future.

1940 - Old City is composed of human-scale mixed-use buildings and seamlessly connected to surrounding neighborhoods, including an active industrial waterfront. The Depression and forthcoming war usher in a period of deferred maintenance and decay of urban neighborhoods across the country. The new Delaware River (Ben Franklin) Bridge foreshadows a new era of mobility.

1965 - Urban renewal in the Ed Bacon era takes shape with the creation of Independence Mall and significant clearance of Society Hill. Across the country, cities seek to save themselves by conforming to a new paradigm of faster movement within larger metropolitan landscapes.

1972 - Renewal continues with large scale redevelopment of previously fine-grained blocks in Old City, clearance to the west, north, and along the river to facilitate I-95. Artists begin populating Old City, and a 1976 master plan by Robert Venturi calls for historic preservation.

1992 - Highway construction to the north and east, and various large footprint redevelopment projects are complete, yet Old City feels more isolated from its surrounding for those on foot. Old City maintains its reputation as a hub for artists, but Philadelphia's decades-long decline continues to pose challenges that are about to begin to reverse.

Today - Philadelphia is growing in population for the first time in half a century, led by a surging greater Center City. This new era of investment, coupled with the urban preferences of "millennials" and "empty nesters" creates an opportunity to not just preserve, but re-assert the historic, human-scale characteristics of Old City through improvements to public space and new development.

Helpful Reference Tools

This Design Guide is one reference among many for how to develop property in Old City. This section outlines a few critical references, which should be part of the design and development process.

Philadelphia Zoning Code

Historical Commission + other publications

Philadelphia Zoning Code

Zoning regulations govern land use, the height and bulk of buildings, population density, parking requirements, the placement of signs, character of development on private property, and property uses.

As the overwhelming majority of Old City is designated CMX-3, this section and the rest of the broader Design Guide is focused principally on that designation and those areas.

Development Standards

Maximum Occupied Area (% of lot)	75% Mid-Block
	80% Corner
Minimum Side Yard Width	8' if used for buildings w/ dwelling units
Maximum Floor Area (% of lot area)	500

Prohibited Uses

Retail Uses: Drug paraphernalia sales, gun shop

Commercial Services Uses: Boarding + other services; amusement arcade; casino; personal credit establishment; body art service

Vehicle + Vehicular Equipment Sales: Commercial vehicle sales + rental

Uses Permitted As-of-Right *(some of these uses, such as nightclubs, are prohibited by various overlay districts; contact the Philadelphia City Planning Commission to clarify questions you may have about what is permitted on your property)*

Residential Uses: Household living; group living; personal care home; single-room residence

Public, Civic, and Institutional Uses: Day care; educational facilities; fraternal organization; hospital; libraries + cultural exhibits; religious assembly; safety services; transit station; utilities + services

Office Uses: Business + professional; medical, dental, health practitioner; government

Retail Uses: Building supplies + equipment; consumer goods; food, beverage, grocery; pets + pet supplies; sundries, pharmaceuticals, convenience sales; wearing apparel + accessories

Commercial Uses: Animal services; assembly + entertainment; nightclubs + private clubs; building services; business support; prepared food shop; take-out restaurant; financial services; funeral services; maintenance +repair of consumer goods; on-premise dry cleaning; personal services (with exceptions); fortune telling; radio, television, + recording services; visitor accommodations; commissaries + catering services

Vehicle + Vehicular Equipment Sales: Personal vehicle repair + maintenance; personal vehicle sales + rental; gasoline station; vehicle equipment + supplies sales + rental

Moving + storage facilities

Industrial Uses: Artist studios + artisan industrial; research & development

Community garden; market or community-supported farm
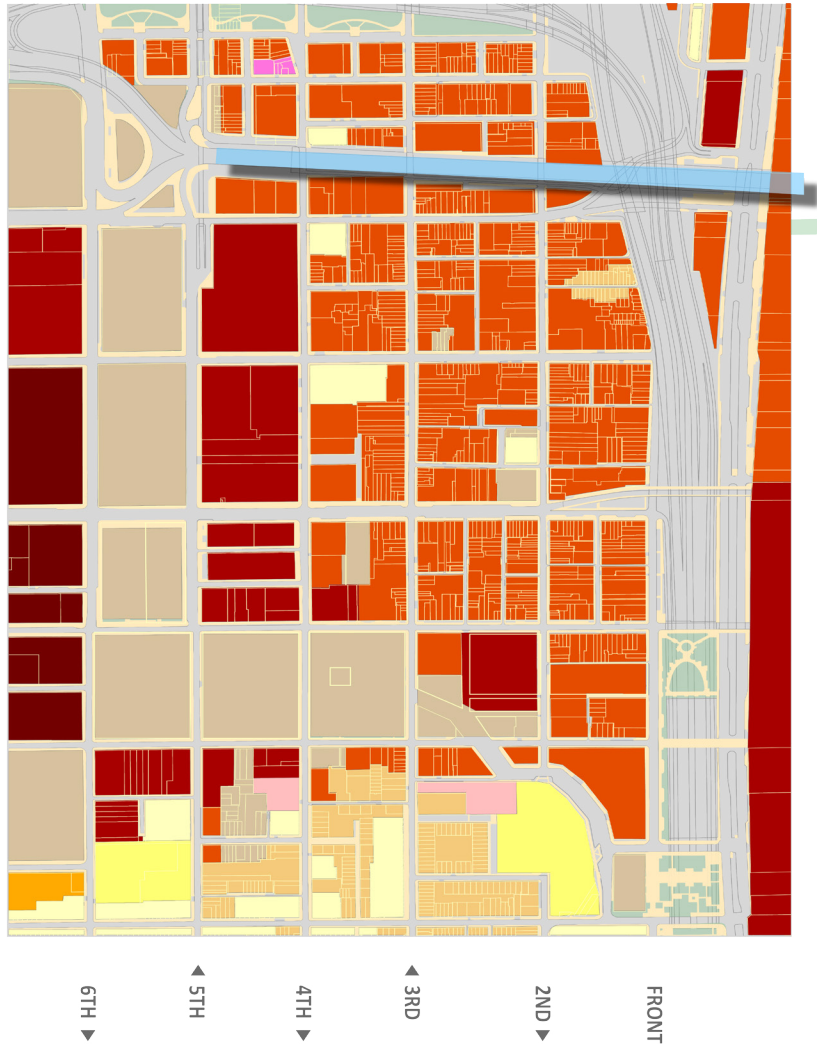
Minimum Parking Required

Multifamily Housing	3 Spaces per 10 units
All Office Uses	Zero
All Retail Uses	Zero
Assembly + Entertainment	Greater of: 1 per 10 seats or 1 per 1000 sf
Educational Facilities	None for first 4000 sf, then 1 space per 1000 sf
Libraries + Cultural Exhibits	1 space per 800 sf
Artist Studios + Artisan Manufacturing	None for first 7500 sf, then 1 space per 2000 sf
Market + Community Supported Farm	None if lot area is less than 5000 sf; otherwise 2

Car Share Spaces: The required minimum number of off-street parking spaces for a residential use may be reduced by four spaces for each automobile parking space reserved as an auto-share parking space, up to a maximum of a 40% reduction in the required minimum number of parking spaces in any one surface parking lot or parking garage. The calculation of maximum surface parking spaces shall not be affected by this reduction.

Bike Parking Spaces: For every five Class 1 bicycle parking spaces that are provided on a lot, the number of required off-street automobile parking spaces may be reduced by one space, up to a maximum reduction of 10% of the required automobile parking spaces.

6TH 5TH 4TH 3RD 2ND FRONT

Additional Zoning Regulations

While the zoning code has been simplified in recent years, last adopted in 2012, a number of overlays and supplemental regulations remain. In order to make them easier to understand, this section organizes these additional regulations by the street to which they apply. Contact the Philadelphia City Planning Commissionto discuss your property in further detail.

Market Street

Parking garage ground floors require active uses

Vehicular ingress and egress prohibited

Vehicular loading + trash storage areas require ZBA special exception permit

South side 25' minimum height

Additional restrictions on accessory uses & structures

Non-accessory signs and animated illumination prohibited

Arch Street

Parking garage ground floors require active uses

Chestnut Street

Parking garage ground floors require active uses

Accessory parking lots, vehicular ingress and egress prohibited

25' Minimum cornice height

Buildings must extend to the streetline for at least 65% of lot frontage

Non-accessory signs, animated illumination, and projecting signs prohibited

Additional retail, commercial, and vehicular sales use restrictions

South of Chestnut Street

If provided, residential parking must be accessed by a shared driveway or rear alley; no parking garages with capacity over 500 vehicles

Walnut Street

Parking garage ground floors require active uses

Accessory parking lots, vehicular ingress and egress prohibited

25' Minimum cornice height

Buildings must extend to the streetline for at least 65% of lot frontage
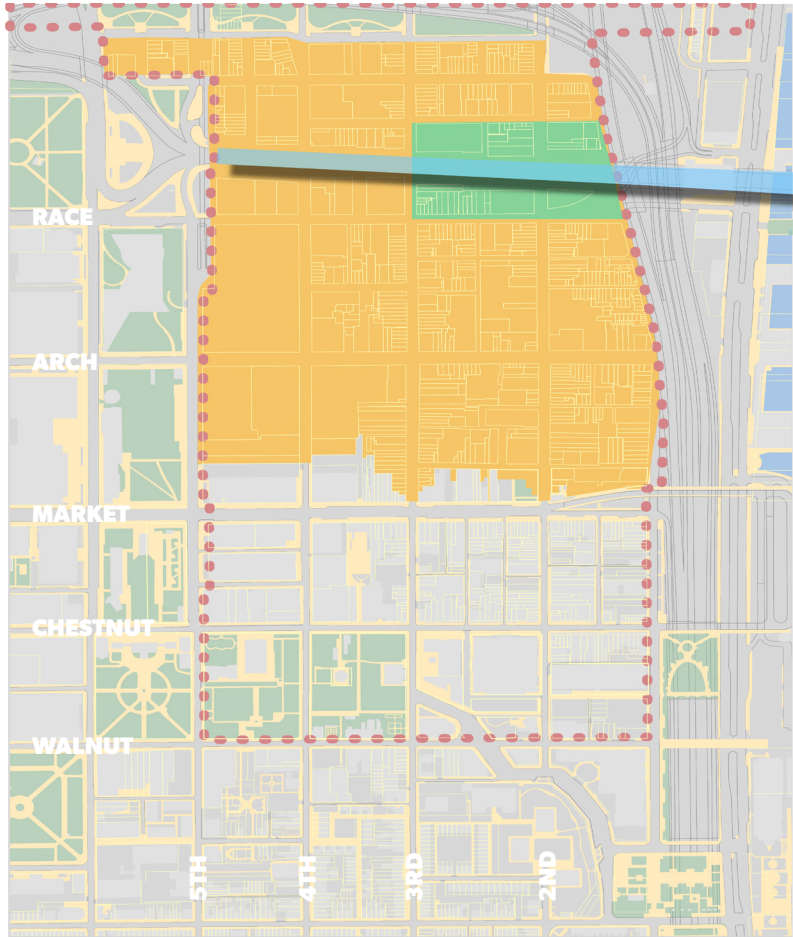
Old City Overlay Zones

Old City Residential
Special Exception Permit required for restaurants and other uses

Old City Residential, Central
65' Height limit
Accessory parking lots prohibited

Bridge Approach
FAR bonuses + no height limit

Philadelphia Historical Commission + Other Publications

Both the Philadelphia Historical Commission and the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia have developed substantial documents that should be used as resources by anybody developing real estate, designing buildings, or fitting out shopfronts in Old City.

The preceding guide is intended not to reiterate or contradict these two valuable publications, but to distill some key values and complement them through the lens of Old City's recently completed neighborhood plan.
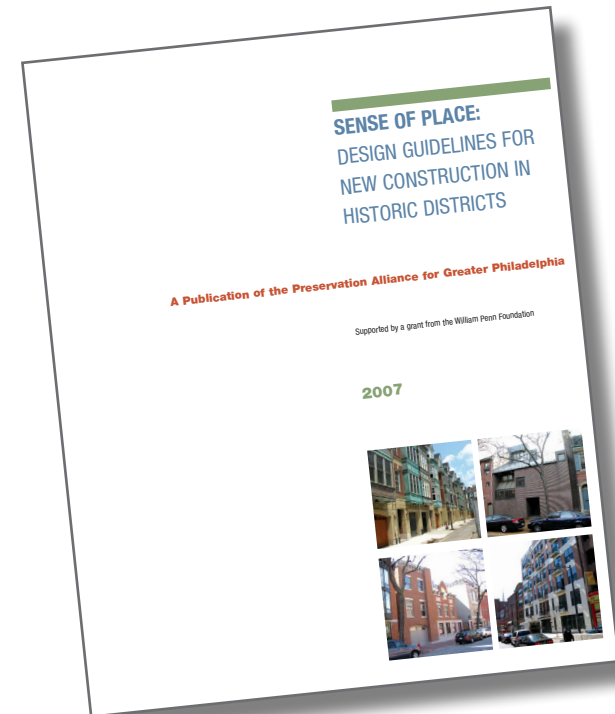
Sense of Place

In 2007, the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, with the support of the William Penn Foundation, authored a general guide for new construction in historic districts like Old City, based on a review of local and national practices and literature. The guide has three objectives:

Guide the Alliance's evaluation of new construction projects and assist community organizations and regulatory agencies in their review of proposals for new construction in historic districts;

**Assist architects and developers** planning and designing projects in historic contexts; and

Stimulate debate about the design of new buildings in historic districts. It is a work in progress that the Alliance expects to refine as they continue to review proposals for new construction in historic districts.

SENSE OF PLACE:
DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

A Publication of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Supported by a grant from the William Penn Foundation

2007

The guide develops a set of evaluation criteria, then presents a series of case study projects, evaluating on those criteria. The criteria are as follows:

General	Facade composition
Height	Rhythm / pedestrian experience
Street line	Materials and details

Sense of Place is a valuable resource for builders and architects, and has contributed to the development of this Old City Design Guide.
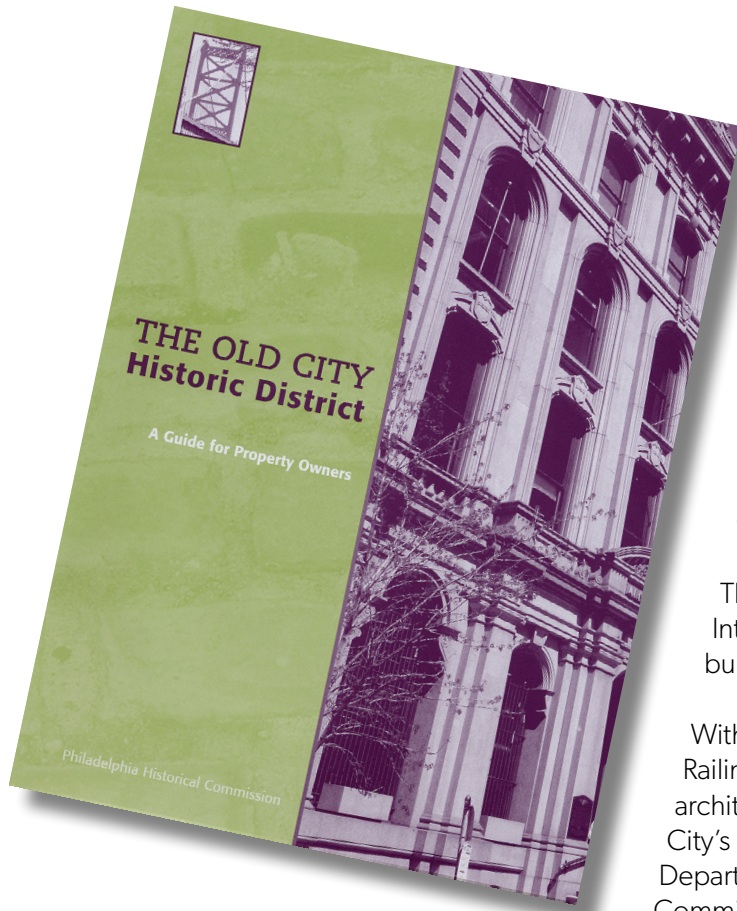
The Old City Historic District: a Guide for Property Owners

The Philadelphia Historical Commission designated Old City an historic district in 2003, classifying resources therein as Significant, Contributing, or Non-Contributing. *When the Historical Commission reviews a building permit application for a Significant or Contributing resource within a historic district, it seeks to protect the individual resource as well as the historic district as a whole. When it reviews a building permit application for a Non-Contributing property within a historic district, it seeks to protect the historic district, but not necessarily elements of the Non-Contributing property.* Classifications are listed in the historic district's inventory.

The Commission, with the support of the National Parks Service, US Department of the Interior, has developed an excellent guide for how to properly maintain and restore historic buildings and materials in Old City.

With chapters on Roofs and Cornices, Masonry, Cast Iron, Windows, Doorways, Stoops, Railings, Gardens, and all the rest, this guide should be a resource of any property owner, architect, developer, or contractor working on a project to maintain or restore one of Old City's irreplaceable buildings. Especially when referred to the Historical Commission by the Department of Licenses and Inspections, but even if not, it is recommended to consult with Commission staff early in the process. The manual clearly outlines which procedures are subject to Historical Commission review, and which are not.

The manual also provides an in-depth review of architectural styles and their characteristics in the Old City Historic District. These styles include: "red and white" industrial buildings of the early 20th century, Greek revival, Italianate, Victorian eclectic, Renaissance revival, Georgian, Federal, Queen Anne, and tapestry brick.

With regard to new construction, the manual suggests that "good architecture is representative of its time; it is better for new construction to reflect our time instead of a false historical impression. At the same time, all new construction should be compatible with the size scale, color, material, and character of the property and neighborhood."

While this seeming contradiction between distinguishable modernity and compatible design may mystify some, it is precisely the reason that builders and their architects must focus on the quality of the buildings they design, the way the enliven the street, and the longevity they are meant to have. The Historical Commission provides the framework for doing so. This Old City Design Guide is meant to complement the Commission's manual.

For downloadable versions of Old City VISION2026 and its supporting documents, please visit:

www.oldcitydistrict.org/vision2026

Questions about development in Old City? Email us at:

info@oldcitydistrict.org

This Design Guide has been created as part of Old City District's mission to support growth and quality of life in the neighborhood. Please join us by taking care of your historic structures, building new ones that will be worthy of preservation in the future, and above all, supporting a more social and civically-minded Old City.

Resources referenced in this document:

Sense of Place
www.preservationalliance.com/publications/SenseofPlace_final.pdf

A Guide for Property Owners
www.phila.gov/historical/PDF/Old_City_Manual.pdf

Sidewalk Cafe Permit Application
www.philadelphiastreets.com/images/uploads/documents/Streets_Sidewalk_Cafe_Review_
Application.pdf

Complete Streets Applications: parklets, bike racks, etc.
http://www.philadelphiastreets.com/complete-streets
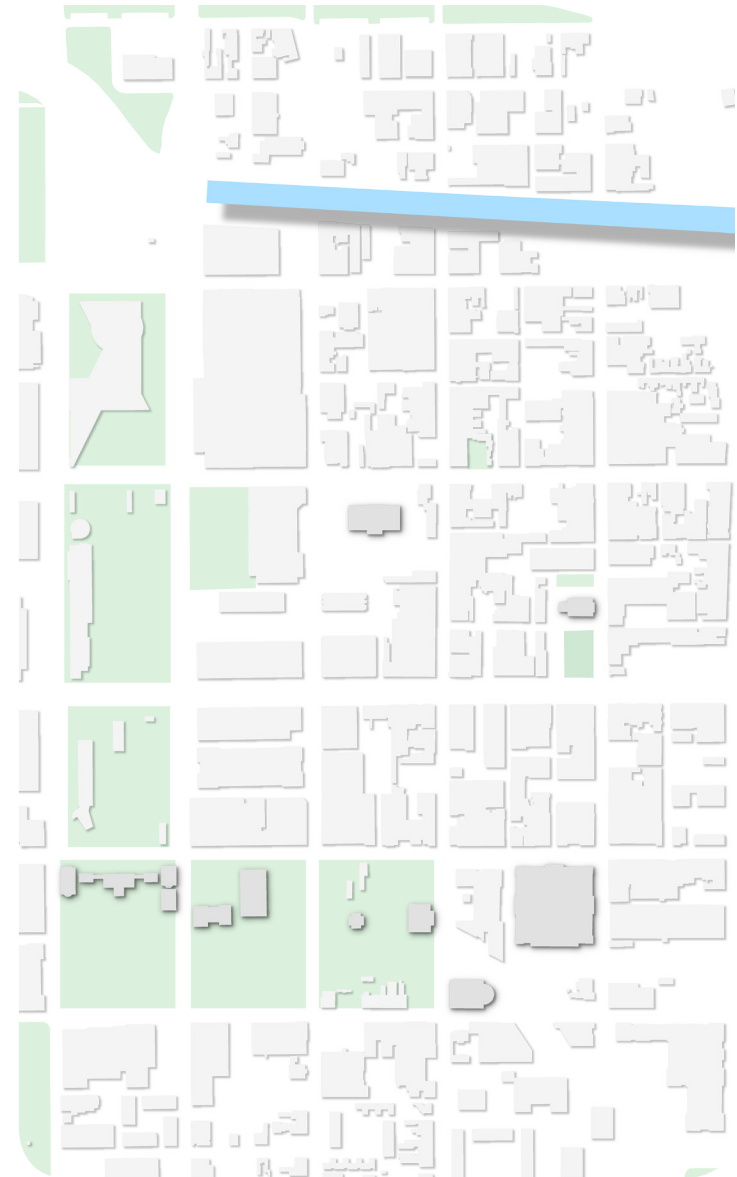
Plan Review Checklist No. 4
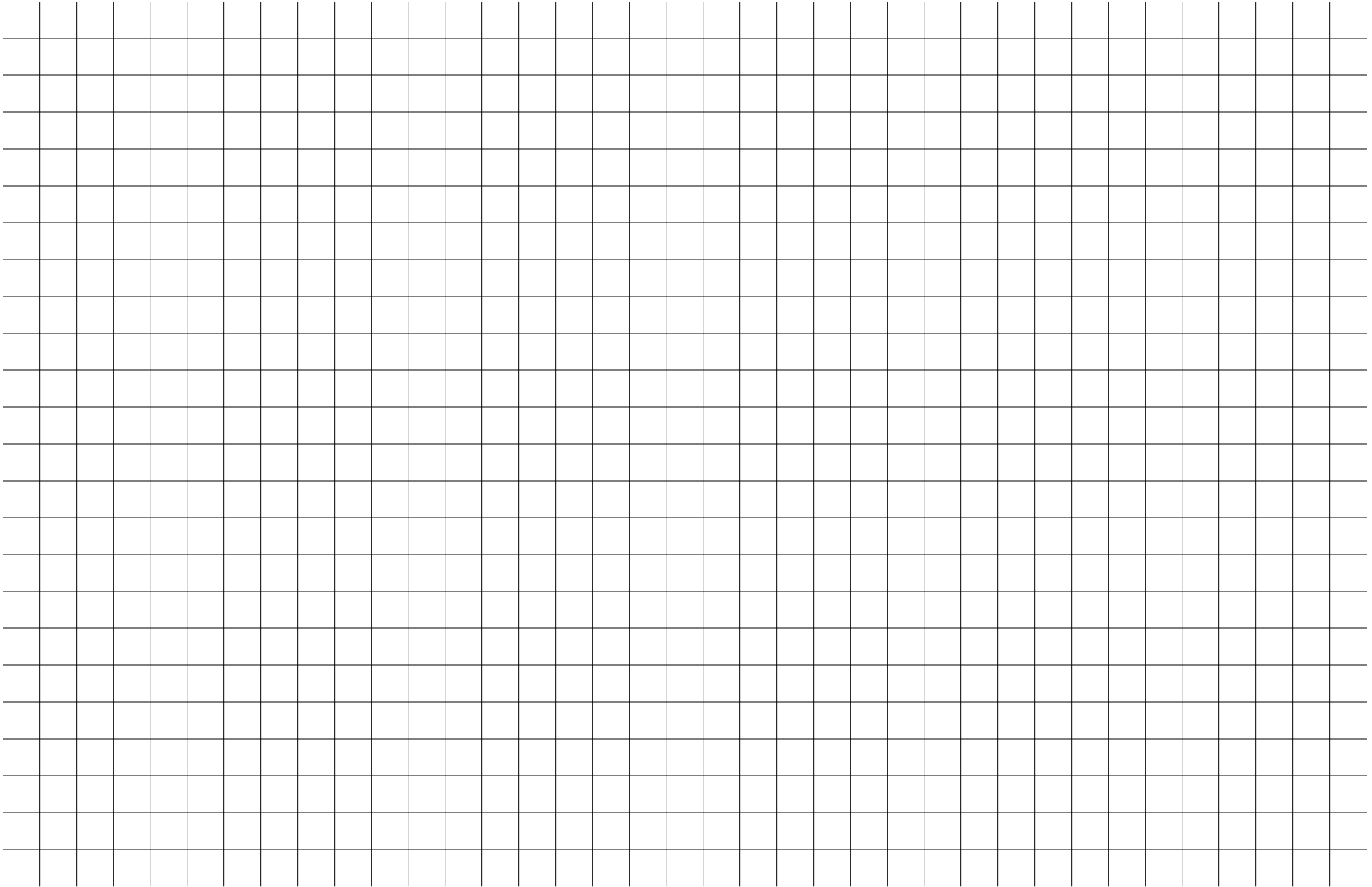www.philadelphiastreets.com/images/uploads/documents/Streets_Plan_Review_Checklist_No_4.pdf

Parking Day
www.parkingdayphila.org

The Architecture of Community. Leon Krier. Island Press. 2009.
https://islandpress.org/book/the-architecture-of-community

Project ideas, sketches, and calculations