

Neighborhood Design Guidelines

(Rough Draft)

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This document was a collective effort of members of the Fishtown Neighbors Association, the East Kensington Neighbors Association and New Kensington Community Development Corporation.

In addition, much of the content is a result of the work done by the Design Advocacy Group. Their mission reads as follows:

The mission of the Design Advocacy Group is to provide an independent and informed public voice for design quality in the architecture and physical planning of the Philadelphia region. Our goal is be proactive as well as reactive; effective as well as thoughtful; critical as well as constructive. We want to create an unparalleled voice for design, a group whose opinion on the quality of our environment is sought after and whose contribution makes a difference. We are a group drawn from a broad spectrum of disciplines, comprised of motivated individuals who are routinely engaged in matters of design, development and planning and who are not afraid to speak out.\

www.designadvocacygroup.com

Committee

Marcus Acheson, Ted Artz, Jeff Carpineta, Sarah Corlett, Kathryn Doherty-Chapman, Robert Fritz, Micah Hanson, Brian Kantorek, Paul Kimport, Rich Levins, Joe McNulty, Nives Mlotich, Dave Nelson, Kerry Nelson, Cosmo Lovecchio, Matt Pappajon, Marilyn Pitt, Sandy Salzman, Shanta Schachter, Patita Shadday, Herb Shallcross, Mildred Schaefflein, Dan Scholnick, Sarah Thorp, Whitney Wexler, Duane Wilcox, James Wright

I. The Neighborhood Identity and Purpose

The following document was the result of collaboration between various community members and leaders in the Fishtown, East Kensington and Port Richmond neighborhoods. Given the recent growth of these areas, the design guidelines were created to foster and encourage responsible development along the Frankford Avenue Commercial Corridor. This avenue possesses a unique composition of mixed-use buildings, residences, industrial warehouses and green space. The eclectic nature of the corridor is an appropriate site for creative development given the concentration of artists and craftsman that reside here. This tool acts as a resource that eases the development process by identifying the wishes of the neighbors. These guidelines also reflect the vision that emerged from years of community driven planning, resulting in the Frankford Avenue Arts Corridor Plan in 2004.

Frankford Avenue is encircled by close-knit, dynamic communities with residents and business owners that express a vested interest in the revitalization of the area. These neighborhoods are inherently sustainable given the human-scale development and building stock along the corridor and the surrounding streets. This is a place where individuals and families not only live, but work as well. People respect and enjoy the heterogeneous nature of buildings along Frankford Avenue and hope that development will consider this appreciation for existing structural features and scale. In particular, Frankford Avenue as a neighborhood commercial corridor has a feeling of openness and 'breathability' that is unique in an urban setting. Developers could best serve those impacted by projects by taking into consideration this characteristic of the neighborhood.

It would serve builders well to review recent community plans as he or she moves forward with development.

Wallace, Robert and Todd 2003 Neighborhood Plan
Frankford Avenue Arts Corridor Plan 2004

Both plans are available on New Kensington Community Development Corporation's website www.nkcdc.org.

II. Process: How to Approach the community

General Project Information

- Address including Building Number and Street.
- Copy of zoning application and refusal.
- Location Map showing surrounding area.
- Zoning District.
- Current zoning designation and requirements under designation. See Appendix A for examples.
- Proposed Use.

Scaled Drawings

Can the drawings and renderings clearly and neatly illustrate the project to someone without any architectural or construction background? Drawings and renderings should include but are not limited to:

1. Proposed Site Plan.
 - Site plan should include but is not limited to building footprint(s), all public amenities, street furniture, plantings, and parking.

- Include a north arrow.
 - Include street names.
 - Include a graphic scale.
2. Proposed Floor Plans
- All floors must be clearly labeled.
 - Include room and space names.
 - Include a north arrow.
 - If applicable, include street names for reference.
 - Include a graphic scale.
3. Proposed **Elevations**.
- Key to floor plans or clearly label elevation direction as north, south, west or east.
 - Render and/or notate materials and finishes.
 - Indicate important heights significant to the project's context including but not limited to storefront windows, canopies, parapet/cornices, step-backs, and roof top elements.
 - Include a graphic scale.
 - Include a human scale element, such as a drawing of a 5'-6" person.
4. Proposed **Sections**.
- Key to floor plans or clearly label elevation direction as north, south, west or east.
 - Indicate important heights significant to the project's context including but not limited to storefront windows, canopies, parapet/cornices, step-backs, and roof top elements.
 - Include a graphic scale.
 - Include a human scale element, such as a drawing of a 5'-6" person.

Renderings and Illustrations

Do the drawings presented articulate the project to the variety of neighbors interested in it? Can it be read by variously disciplined people? Three-dimensional renderings, photomontage, or models are encouraged to help clearly illustrate the project.

Scale

Are the drawings and renderings presented at a scale such that they can be seen by a spectator in a large room?

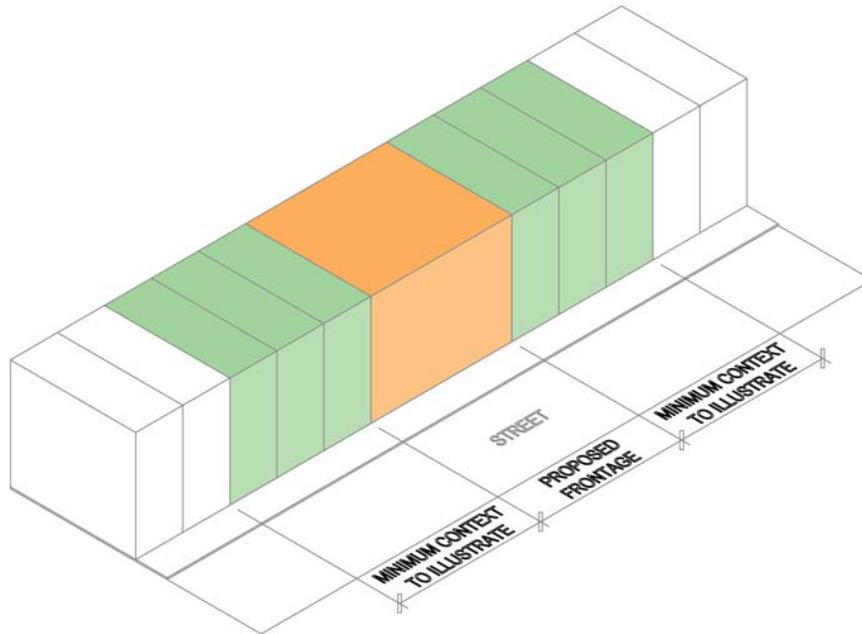
- It is suggested that individual three-dimensional renderings or photomontage images be presented in formats no smaller than 12" x 18". Larger images are always encouraged.
- For projects on lots smaller than 5,000 square feet, scaled drawings (floor plans and elevations) should be presented at a scale no smaller than 1/4" = 1'-0".
- For projects on lots larger than 5,000 square feet, scaled drawings (floor plans and elevations) should be presented at a scale of 1/8" = 1'-0" unless this will not fit on a 24" x 36" board. In this event, smaller scales are acceptable.

Context

Do the drawings and illustrations present the project in its context? Is the extent of existing context sufficiently presented related to the overall scope and scale of the project?

- It is suggested that the elevations and renderings illustrate existing structures' street frontages to an extent equal to twice the proposed structures' total street frontage. Refer to the following

diagram:



- The extent of existing buildings' street frontages illustrated should not be less than two buildings or lots to either side of the proposed structures.
- It is further suggested that the sections illustrate existing structures' street frontages to an extent that neighboring facades immediately opposite proposed address and rear facades immediately adjacent to the rear of the proposed address are cut to show relationship of height and street fell. How does this proposal affect the avenue?

*Note: Words in **bold type** are explained in the accompanying Glossary of Terms.*

III. Guidelines

Neighborhood Context

1. Zoning

What **zoning variances** to the **Zoning and Planning Code** would be required for the development, and would they be consistent with the community master plan and urban design best practices?

2. Use

Would the proposed building uses be appropriate to the particular site and the neighborhood and is the development consistent with the community master plan?

Specific Recommendations

As an emerging commercial corridor, it is important that development along Frankford Avenue is built with the flexibility to support the growing need for additional commercial space. In other

words, mixed use is highly encouraged. Should first floor residential be constructed, it should be built so as to allow for ready conversion for a commercial use to meet demand as necessary..

Use of buildings should thoughtfully reflect the use of the block currently and should consider how effectively it functions under its current use. For example, blocks of the Frankford Avenue Commercial Corridor have strong residential uses and can successfully remain this way. Other blocks pose great possibility for vibrant commercial uses that would support the families and individuals living and working nearby.

3. Density

Could the proposed **density of use** be adequately supported by adjacent **transportation infrastructure**, or would the project contribute to unacceptable levels of congestion? How would the density proposed impact conditions related to density such as noise, sanitary transportation, sewage and utility infrastructure?

4. Amenities

Would the proposed development include the construction or enhancement of any public amenities, such as parks, plazas, playgrounds, community centers, libraries, or transit stops?

5. Connections

Would the project enhance pedestrian linkages to neighboring public amenities?

6. History

Does the proposed design appropriately incorporate or respond to any **historic assets**, or would the development destroy or compromise such assets?

7. Environment

Would the building preserve and enhance the existing natural resources while addressing its own environmental impact appropriately?

Street Life

1. Activity

Would the building uses at street level promote sidewalk activity? Are the building fronts designed to articulate pedestrian entrances? Would the appearance of activity within the building on the second and third floors be visible from the street?

2. Continuity

Would the proposed development maintain or strengthen the existing **street edge**, or would it create an interruption in urban continuity?

Specific Recommendation

Front garages are discouraged. Such features break the street wall, discourage pedestrian engagement and compromise the safety of residents with cars backing out into the traffic of a commercial corridor.

3. Streetscape

Would the sidewalk be enhanced with amenities such as benches, paving patterns, and planters so as to enhance the pedestrian experience? Are the curb-cuts, service entries, and vehicular access ways minimized and designed to create comfortable and safe interactions between pedestrians, bicycles and motor vehicles?

4. Landscaping

Has the proposed landscaping been designed to link the building with its site in a meaningful way? Would existing street trees be maintained and would new trees and plantings be added?

Would the proposal be in accordance with the community streetscape plan?

5. Parking

Would automobile parking be handled in a way to minimize the impact on the surroundings? Has underground parking been fully explored? If above ground parking decks are part of the proposal, would they be set behind building elements with human uses so as not to be visible from the street?

6. Servicing

Would the design of the loading and servicing provisions be appropriate to the building and neighborhood?

Building Character

1. Height

Would the height and form of the building have a positive relationship with the street and surrounding buildings as viewed from both near and far? Would the shadow cast by the building adversely affect neighboring buildings and outdoor public space? Would the building obstruct any important view corridors?

Specific Recommendations

In order to preserve the open feel of the neighborhoods the corridor passes through, new development and rehabilitation projects should not exceed a building height of 35 feet.

2. Massing

Would the massing of the building be an appropriate response to the context? Would the height and width of the building be appropriately subdivided into component parts? Do the elevation and sections drawings articulate the contextual relationship of window heights, storefront or entrances, parapets, etc. in relation to the neighboring building?

3. Composition

Does the design of the façade form a sophisticated composition of component parts? Does the architectural vocabulary relate to the existing context or create a meaningful juxtaposition? Would the design of the building enliven the streetscape?

4. Materials

Would the building materials and colors be attractive and appropriate to the surroundings? Would the materials be durable and are they employed in an appropriate manner. Would any reflections created by the wall or window materials adversely impact the surrounding buildings or street? Would the developer maintain a commitment to utilize the proposed materials through the completion of the project?

5. Openings

Have the building entrances been designed to express the importance of the connection between the interior and exterior of the building? Would the **scale** of the entrances be appropriate to the neighborhood context? Would each of the dominant walls of the building have a sufficient number of door and window openings? Would the scale and proportion of the window openings and their articulation form a positive relationship with architecture character of the surrounding buildings?

6. Roof

Has the roof edge been designed to express the termination of the building in an attractive or meaningful manner? Are the rooftop mechanical units and penthouses successfully incorporated into the design of the building?

7. Sustainability

Would the project utilize **sustainable materials and building practices**? Have site issues such as **storm water runoff**, **urban heat island effect**, and **light pollution** been considered? Would the project use water efficiently by reducing water consumption and reducing waste water? Have energy efficiency strategies such as building orientation for **passive solar heating/cooling**, optimizing building envelope insulation values; energy efficient equipment, appliances and fixtures; and **on-site renewable energy** or “**green power**” been considered? Will materials and resources be used efficiently by reusing existing buildings; managing construction waste; reusing resources such as salvaged material; or integrating materials with recycled, locally manufactured, or **rapidly renewable** content into the design?

Specific Recommendations

While not required, LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) Certification through the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC – www.usgbc.org) is encouraged.

Vegetated or “green” roofs are encouraged as a way to reduce solar heat gain, reduce storm water run-off and mitigate the “urban heat island effect.”

Where large paved areas such as parking lots are required, it is recommended that pervious pavers be used to reduce storm water run off and mitigate the “urban heat island effect.”

On-site renewable energy technologies such as solar panels are rapidly becoming more efficient and affordable. Many programs exist that may offset initial costs. Where possible, these technologies are highly encouraged.

IV. Builder Credibility Guidelines

Intention:

Builders/Developers/Owners seeking variance or approvals should be able to represent their credibility to the local community via the representative zoning committees. This paves the way for a healthy relationship between the applicant and the community- a win for everyone involved.

Transparency and care for community are up-front priorities. Any (re)development activity must be mindful of resident’s quality-of-life and practical concerns.

Guidelines:

Applicable to whom?

Depending on the scope and nature of the project, credibility criteria may apply to the Site Owner, (Entity, Individual, Board, etc.) and other Interested Parties. *

What can be expected?

(Note on Fairness)

New developers, entrepreneurs, and visionaries are highly encouraged to bring their ideas to the community. Credentials and history are viewed in context of many other factors including the strength of the plan, consideration of neighborhood identity, and openness to dialogue.

Share Your History.....

- **Resume and Credentials:** Depending on the scope of the proposal, applicants may be asked to provide a resume and if applicable, a Builder’s Brochure and licenses.
- **Visual Examples:** Applicants are encouraged to provide some visual illustration of past projects (if any) specifically photos of a completed project.

- Community in put on builder reputation: The communities surrounding the prior development site may be consulted to report whether they were shown consideration with fair dealing and proper site practices. Items of interest may include;
 - Were the builders polite to residents, respectful of streets, alleys, and sidewalks?
 - Were hazards created underfoot or overhead?
 - Were noise regulations upheld to respect residents around the site?
 - Were prior project plans transparent to the community?
 - Were proper permits obtained for the work?
 - How long did it take to complete the project?
 - Was the project completed in accordance with the plan presented?
- Zoning Experiences: Items for Consideration
 - Have you ever applied for a zoning variance or related permissions/approvals?
 - What was the project under consideration- location/scope/date?
 - What was the outcome of the appeal/request?
 - If your application was denied, please share your story telling why.

Neighborhood Awareness: Community Connection builds Credibility

Credibility is one part of building a positive relationship with the community in which you plan to build. Understanding the neighborhoods needs and desires while demonstrating this through your actions is also necessary.

Applicants are expected to do homework and cultivate some personal connection to the history, identity, and fabric of the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Plans and related materials will be available through the Zoning Committees. Beyond that there is no substitute for first hand interaction. The resident-led committee is committed to helping applicants get a real sense of place, and the powerful role that responsible development can play in enriching life for all.

Looking and listening will creatively shape your approach and add to your success.

* Credibility Guidelines may apply to any person or entity that has an interest in a project including but not limited to the following;

Architect(s), Engineers, Site Planners, Remediation Specialists, General Contractors, Site Supervisors or related project heads.

Organizers of Condo Associations for the Site.

Persons slated to assume ownership, management, or development responsibility *in any phase*.

All other persons or entities which may be in Agreements with such persons to assume ownership or related interests in the site development are expected to meet same credibility

expectations and may be consulted before approvals are given. For Example: Parties to contracts, partners, etc.

V. Glossary of Terms

Definitions of some of the terms used in the Urban Design Evaluation are provided below:

Density of Use – the number of individuals per unit of area. Higher levels of density must be appropriately supported by the urban infrastructure to prevent overcrowding and congestion. The advantages of denser settlement patterns include the decrease of separating distances between individuals, businesses, and institutions; the increase of social interactions; and the preservation of natural resources, such as land and energy (decrease of sprawl). The common means to measure and regulate density of development is by Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is the proportional relationship between the total floor area of the buildings and the land on which they are built.

Elevation – the rendering of the front of a building.

Green Power – term used to describe energy purchased from providers that generate renewable energy from sources such as solar, water, wind, biomass and geothermal.

Historic Assets – buildings or aspects of neighborhoods that hold significant shared memories for the residents and provide historic identity for the community. Some buildings are specifically recognized by the city for their historic character and are provided with a degree of protection from destruction or significant alterations to the exterior. Some neighborhoods that have many historic structures have been recognized as Historic Districts or, alternatively, Conservation Districts, and these classifications provide certain levels of protection for the neighborhood as a whole.

Light Pollution – Phenomena caused by stray light from unshielded light sources and light reflecting off surfaces that enters the atmosphere where it illuminates and reflects off dust, debris and water vapor to cause an effect known as “sky glow.” Light pollution substantially limits visual access to the night sky.

On-site Renewable Energy – term used to describe energy generated on a building site by using technologies that convert energy from the sun, wind, and biomass into useable energy.

Passive Solar Heating/Cooling - refers to the use of the sun's energy for the heating and cooling of living spaces. In this approach, the building itself or some element of it takes advantage of natural energy characteristics in materials and air created by exposure to the sun. Passive systems are simple, have few moving parts, and require minimal maintenance and require no mechanical systems.

that substantially replenish themselves faster than traditional extraction demand (i.e. planted and harvested in less than a 10-year cycle).

Scale – a general design term used to describe the size and proportions of a building and its components, such as stairways, windows, doorways, cornices, and ornamentation.

For example: The *scale* of Independence Hall is consistent with most historic houses in Society Hill, but not with most new high-rise buildings.

Section – a cutting of a building, or piece of said building cut off at right angles to an axis as indicated in Plan or Elevation; *also*: a representation of such cutting

Storm Water Runoff – Water volumes that are created during precipitation events and flow over surfaces into sewer systems or receiving waters. All precipitation waters that leave project site boundaries on the surface are considered to be storm water runoff volumes.

Street Edge – a term often used to describe the line to which the front walls of buildings on a particular street are built. For example: If a new store on Chestnut Street is built with its front wall back twenty feet from the front of all the other buildings on the block to provide off-street parking spaces, that building can be said to have not maintained the *street edge*.

Sustainable Materials and Building Practices – terms used to describe a wide range of building practices and materials that are designed to limit the depletion of natural resources. Building designs that utilize such practices are often referred to as “Green Architecture”.

Transportation Infrastructure – includes all built aspects of the private and public systems of transportation, such as rail lines, roadways, bridges, parking lots, and bike paths.

Urban Heat Island Effect – term describing the phenomena when warmer temperatures are experienced in urban landscapes compared to adjacent rural areas as a result of solar energy retention on constructed surfaces. Principal surfaces that contribute to the heat island effect include streets, sidewalks, parking lots, and buildings.

Zoning and Planning Code – the legal guidelines by which the city controls the uses of buildings or areas of land and also the rules about building size and height, setbacks from lot lines, and required open space.

Zoning Variances – the legal remedies by which property owners may obtain permission to build structures that do not fully correspond to the existing zoning codes. In Philadelphia, variance requests are reviewed by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA).

VI. Appendix A

City resources and incentive programs

American Street Financial Services Center www.asfsc.org

Empowerment Zone www.empowermentzone.org

City Licenses & Inspections <http://webapps.phila.gov/li/>

Next Great City www.nextgreatcity.com

Penn Future www.pennfuture.org

Philadelphia Planning Commission www.philaplanning.org

Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation www.philadelphiacommercial.org

Philadelphia Historical Commission <http://www.phila.gov/historical/>

Plan Philly www.planphilly.com

Real Estate Tax Abatement http://brtweb.phila.gov/brt.apps/OnlineApps/onlineapps_home.aspx

Neighborhood resources

Delaware River City Corp www.drcc-phila.org

East Kensington Neighbors Association www.ekna.org

Fishtown Neighbors Association www.fishtownlife.com

Fishtown Zoning Committee www.fnazoning.com

Fishtown Blog www.fishtown.us

New Kensington Community Development Corporation www.nkcdc.org

Philly Blog www.phillyblog.com

VII. Appendix B

Examples of significant building stock on Frankford Avenue (TBD)

Examples of discouraging development (TBD)

VIII. Appendix C Fishtown Historic District

National Register Eligibility:

The Fishtown Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as one of the first important industrial communities in Philadelphia. The industrial and commercial enterprises within the community played a significant role in the economic development of Philadelphia past the Industrial Revolution. It is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as an intact working-class neighborhood dating from the early-

nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, consisting of a cohesive mix of related industrial, commercial and residential resources.

What does this mean? This implies that should a building owner seek federal money for renovations, the owner is subject to the same restrictions as those buildings that exist in districts that have been officially designated. See specifics below:

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations, 36 CFR 800, apply to all projects assisted by federal funding, licenses or approvals. The 106 process requires the identification of properties listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in the project area and an assessment of the undertaking's effect on them. As a Certified Local Government under the National Historic Preservation Act, the City has entered memoranda of agreement with the Advisory Council, the State Historic Preservation Office, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and with the Federal Highway Administration to expedite 106 by having the Historical Commission perform the 106 review for many projects by these agencies.

For more information and a map of the eligible area, contact the Philadelphia Historical Commission.