

# Philadelphia's Comprehensive City Plan of 1960

## Philadelphia City Planning Commission

In 1960, the City Planning Commission presented a comprehensive plan to Mayor Richardson Dilworth. The Philadelphia of 1960 had enjoyed a long history of growth and economic success, but the Planning Commission saw a city at a turning point. The following excerpts show close parallels to the city's current planning outlook, and gives us a benchmark to see how far we have (or haven't) come.

### Introduction

In the pages that follow is a blueprint for the Philadelphia of tomorrow. It is a blueprint of a new kind of city, its beginnings already in evidence, which is within the financial and physical means of Philadelphia's people to bring to full realization in the remaining decades of this century.

It is a proposal based on two fundamental assumptions: that a city's reason for being is to provide a satisfactory environment for those who live and work in it, and that Philadelphia as a city must provide this and much more to its people if it is to survive in the vigorously competitive conditions of the future — against other cities on the one hand and against its own suburban areas on the other.

The steps that must be taken to bring these things about constitute the core of this comprehensive plan. Its sponsors believe this plan is best designed to meet major civic needs which are urgent for Philadelphia.

### The Strategy of Development

It makes a great difference which projects are done first. Unless the city undertakes the projects of the comprehensive plan in a proper sequence it may be impossible to achieve the goals of the plan, which is based on a number of background condition assumptions. An unwise sequence of development might allow these conditions to change and make the plan obsolete.

The major background condition assumptions of the plan include the following:

- Center City will remain the dominant regional center.
- The city's economic growth will proceed rapidly enough to enable the city to invest in the facilities called for.
- The city will maintain a balanced population, including middle and high, as well as low-income families.

The three background assumptions are closely related. They express a belief that the city, through public action, can halt the commonly observed weakening of the city's economic position due to competition from the suburbs. In the recent past, growth in sales, in production, and in medium and high-income residential population has become typical of the suburbs. On the other hand, slowing down of economic growth and a replacement of higher-income population by lower-income population has become characteristic of the city.

In order to combat this trend and validate the background assumptions of the plan, public improvement programming must concentrate on those investments that can be demonstrated to contribute to increasing the vitality of the city economy in general and to strengthening the city's tax base in particular. Examples of such investments are those which, by improving access, local circulation, parking, and amenities will foster economic activity in Center City and in the several sub-centers. Improving radial rapid transit to Center City is one of the best ways of reinforcing its position. Development and redevelopment of land for industry and improvement of the city's port and airport facilities also serve this end directly.

Improvement of the transportation system, although no tax revenues result directly from it, may have the largest single effect on reducing the costs of doing business in Philadelphia, and thereby spur economic growth in the city and cause increase in tax revenues. However, if an expressway is scheduled at such a time that new industrial and commercial sites benefiting from the improved access are available for development in the suburbs but not in the city, then such an expressway is likely to weaken the city economy. Therefore, expressways must be scheduled carefully and coordinated with the scheduling of redevelopment and industrial promotion projects.

Aside from timing considerations that derive from the availability of developable land within and outside the city, the inherent benefit of each expressway to the city is a basis for determining scheduling. Some expressways improve the accessibility of city sites much more than suburban sites and, therefore, from the city's point of view, should be scheduled as soon as possible. The Delaware Expressway [known today as I-95], which lies within the city for some 15 miles, serves industrial areas along nearly all of that distance and acts as a radial expressway to Center City from both the north and the south, is a prime example. Its construction should be expedited.

Facilities — like the proposed Municipal Services Building — that will reduce the operating costs of government obviously deserve high priority because the savings they will bring will be realized directly by the city.

Vital as it is, improvement of the economic base proper cannot be pursued at the expense of deterioration of the residential environment. If the residential environment does not remain at least as good as it is now, those citizens who are able to do so will move away. These very citizens who have the ability to move are the same as those who are the most desirable for the city to have as residents, for they are the people who have achieved higher incomes and can provide higher tax revenue to the city. They are the people who have become successful in other spheres,



*City of Philadelphia circa 1960.  
From Philadelphia Planning Commission report.*

**Table 1: Planning Commission Population Estimates for the City of Philadelphia from 1960 to 1980 Compared to Actual Population**

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA		
	1960 Comprehensive Plan Projection	Actual City Population
<b>1950</b>	—	2,071,605
<b>1960</b>	2,337,000	2,002,512
<b>1970</b>	2,521,000	1,949,996
<b>1980</b>	Between 2,250,000 to 2,755,000*	1,688,210
<b>1990</b>	—	1,585,577
<b>2000</b>	—	1,517,550

\* Comprehensive Plan predicted that residential development and redevelopment would be at lower densities than existed in 1960. With lower density development, the plan authors thought the population would be lower than the 2.75 million number their calculations projected.

too, and can provide the kinds of leadership the city needs if it is to continue to lead its region. Therefore, at a minimum, future capital programs must include improvements to the residential environment that will prevent the flight to the suburbs of such people.

Because it serves the end of improving the residential environment, and also because if not achieved now, it will not be possible to achieve ever, the acquisition of open space for recreation deserves a high place in immediate programming. If it is to be acquired before it is built on, most open land called for in the plan should be bought within the next six-year program; virtually all of it should be obtained within the next ten years.

### Population of the City and Its Suburbs Compared

Although the differences in make-up between the populations of the city and its suburbs are not so great as they would be if the municipal boundary were a demarcation between the densely developed and sparsely developed portions of the metropolitan area, they are nevertheless of sufficient importance to command serious attention in the designing of the comprehensive plan.

Actually, more than ten percent of the suburbs' population lives in the cities of Camden and Chester, under conditions not unlike those in the central portions of Philadelphia, while sizable portions of northeast, northwest and southwest Philadelphia have residential densities lower than in many of the unincorporated suburban communities.

Philadelphia's population is considerably older than that of the suburbs, with most of the difference resulting from lower percentages of children and higher percentages of elderly person in the city than in the suburbs.

There is a lower percentage of males but a higher percentage of females participating in the labor force in Philadelphia than in the suburbs, and a higher percentage of unemployment among males in the city. There is also a significantly larger percentage of the suburbs' population in the higher-paid occupations, such as professional and technical people, managers, officials and proprietors and craftsmen and foremen. A much higher percentage of city residents are engaged in the lower-paid occupations, such as clerical, sales, service and laborers.

By far the sharpest contrasts between the population of Philadelphia and its suburbs are on the basis of educational attainment and individual worker incomes during 1949. Although percentages for graduates of grammar school and high school do not differ greatly, the percentage of college-trained persons is much higher in the suburbs. The suburbs greatly outrank Philadelphia in percentage of persons in the higher income brackets.

### Population Forecasts

A plan must wrestle not only with present needs but with future requirements, and therefore it is just as important to anticipate the future as to understand the forces at work in the present situation. Here, we turn to some of the major changes that may be expected to take place with respect to the size and composition of Philadelphia and the metropolitan area within the next few decades.

A number of agencies have undertaken estimates of the population of the metropolitan area to the year 1980. Although different methods have been used in making the estimate, these studies have all agreed that a population of approximately six million may be anticipated for the area by 1980. Depending on the continuation of various socio-economic trends and the pattern of land development intensity, population estimates for the city of Philadelphia vary

from 2.25 million to 2.75 million. For the purposes of the plan, the working figure for the 1980 Philadelphia population is 2.25 million.

### Economic Forecasts

Philadelphia's metropolitan economy is exceptionally diversified, with 87 percent of all census-defined industries found within its boundaries. Except for the insignificance of its farming activities, the metropolitan economy is, in many ways, a miniature of the national one, and the overall level of business activity in it has tended generally to reflect conditions in the nation as a whole.

The overall size of the metropolitan economy is projected to expand at a rate that will continue the pace that has marked economic growth in the region since World War II. Population gains in the Philadelphia metropolitan region itself, together with the expansion of the region's national markets, will generate increases estimated at 125 percent in the output of goods and services, 41 percent in total employment, and 109 percent in total personal income. Continuing technological innovation, particularly in the region's growth industries, will bring rises of 59 percent in metropolitan productivity and 46 percent in per capita income.

The composition of Philadelphia's metropolitan economy also is expected to evolve in a manner that will extend recent regional trends. With the exception of textiles, no major manufacturing groups are expected to suffer absolute decreases; in fact, substantial gains are anticipated for several of these groups such as food, machinery, and metals. Nevertheless, the relative share of manufacturing will continue to decline at the rate that has prevailed in the region since World War II. In this respect, the region will move in a direction opposite to that taken by the nation as a whole.

The increasing proportions of non-manufacturing industries in the future regional economy will result from two major trends. First, regional manufacturing activity will grow comparatively slowly due to the economics of industrial location that have been making other sections of the country relatively more attractive to manufacturing enterprises. Second, the city's role as an administrative and distributive center will be greatly strengthened during the next 20 years—an expansion expressed most dramatically for the high gains foreseen for finance, insurance and real estate, and for public administration.

### The Changing Spatial Pattern of the Metropolitan Economy

At present, the economy is highly centralized in the city of Philadelphia. Nearly two-thirds of regional production takes place within the city, and about one-half of the region's total personal income goes to city residents.

The next twenty years is expected to bring substantial changes in the spatial pattern of the metropolitan economy. Although it will still be concentrated in Philadelphia, by 1980 the economy is expected to have become much less centralized. This change will be a natural consequence of suburban population growth, and of the availability of large tracts of vacant land in the seven-county ring.

*[Editor's note: The comprehensive plan outlines detailed plans for industry, commerce, and housing. Here, we highlight two other areas the comprehensive plan covers—community space and transportation.]*

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*Society Hill Towers with Head House Square in the foreground, 1964.*



## The Plan for Recreation and Community Facilities

The quality and location of Philadelphia's recreation areas, schools, libraries, health facilities, and governmental services are as important to the city's vitality as its industries, houses, and transportation system. They contribute to the health and well-being of its citizens and have a great influence on the quality of living in the city.

Two of the proposals made here are central to the entire plan. One is the creation of many more areas of open space than now exist in the city. The other is the regrouping of community facilities within the city, around local centers.

### *Open Space*

The comprehensive plan proposes a major increase in the number of existing playgrounds and playfields and a doubling of district parks. It provides one playground for every 11,000 to 12,000 resi-

dents, and one playfield for every five or six playgrounds. Playgrounds range from three to eight acres each and playfields range from eight to 20 acres.

It proposes that local parks be provided in new neighborhoods, and in old neighborhoods that are undergoing renewal. Local parks will range in size from one to five acres.

The existing large parks are proposed to be extended, and two new ones created, one along the valley of Poquessing Creek and the other along the Schuylkill River in Roxborough. At present, there are only five acres of regional parks per 1,000 persons in the metropolitan region; it is proposed that Philadelphia work with the surrounding counties and the state toward a goal of 21 acres of regional park per 1,000 persons, which, it is hoped, will ultimately be reached through the development of 26 new state and county parks.

### *Community and Neighborhood Centers*

The plan proposes to create ten district centers throughout the city to serve as focal points, where public facilities such as district libraries, health centers and branch offices of city departments will be grouped near a major shopping center for easy access.

The plan also proposes to create 56 community centers at focal points for smaller areas of the city. These will bring together the community library, the satellite health clinic, the smaller shopping center, and voluntary community-service agencies. The secondary school and playfield will be located nearby.

### **The Plan for the Transportation System**

The central objective of this part of the comprehensive plan is the development of a system that will move people and goods quickly, cheaply and conveniently between any and all points of the city, and do it so as to give passengers and shippers a reasonable choice of facilities and routes. In order to accomplish an objective so broad, the plan makes proposals for major improvements in public transit, streets, highways and expressways, and deals briefly with improvements in the city's publicly supported facilities for air and water travel.

Major proposals of the transportation plan include:

- An expressway system of 95 miles within the city to meet the free movement needs of long trips and to relieve arterial and local streets of long-distance traffic impact.
- An arterial street system of about 500 miles to meet the needs of middle-distance trips, serve the expressway system, and reduce the traffic on local streets.
- A rail rapid-transit system in subway or open-cut to meet peak-hour demands for commuter traffic to Center City and to certain other points of high concentration. This includes ten miles of new line and eight reconstructed miles.

- A completely connected commuter rail rapid transit system to deliver peak loads to Center City from outlying suburban areas. A downtown commuter loop to replace the present Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads Terminals is proposed.
- A system of automobile parking facilities that will meet the downtown parking demands consistent with a reasonable level of street capacity, the demand for parking at commercial subcenters, and other high concentration points.
- A system of railroad and port facilities to meet requirements for long-distance, heavy-goods movement.

### **Conclusion**

Without far-sighted and imaginative planning for the most effective future use of its land, its industrial and commercial facilities, and the skills of its people, it has become evident that Philadelphia cannot maintain for long its present enviable position among the great cities of the nation and the world.

Time has not always been on Philadelphia's side, but in this instance it seems to be. For the "new Philadelphia" now emerging, here are the guide rails which, given proper pace and acceleration, can lead the city to a future far more brilliant than her past.

The Comprehensive Plan of 1960 was begun in 1954 and completed by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. The full plan is available from the City Archives located at 3101 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. For more information about recent plans and initiatives for the city, visit [www.philaplanning.org](http://www.philaplanning.org)