

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 041017)

RESOLUTION

Authorizing Philadelphia City Council's Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to hold public hearings to investigate residential and commercial development in Philadelphia, including waterfront development and the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia's recommendations to encourage new construction in the City.

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia, in 2002, built the fewest new housing units of any of the 10 largest cities, authorizing only 1,000 new units; and

WHEREAS, City Council and the Mayor recognize the importance of waterfront development in the City for the economic and cultural growth of Philadelphia, but there is currently no single city agency that has taken ownership of waterfront development; and

WHEREAS, Recently, the City has announced plans to redevelop the Navy Yard and the banks of the Northern Delaware River; however, no plans have been announced to develop the land between the two sites; and

WHEREAS, For decades, proposals have been submitted to develop Penn's Landing, but each plan has faltered for various reasons. The Mayor recently rejected developers' plans for development on the Landing because they required significant public subsidy. Last year, several community groups contracted Wallace, Roberts and Todd, an urban planning consultant that helped design Baltimore's Inner Harbor, to study Penn's Landing that resulted in a comprehensive development plan. In May 2004, the plan was presented to the Administration, but, despite repeated attempts to follow-up, the Administration has neither adopted the plan nor continued discussions; and

WHEREAS, The Building Industry Association of Philadelphia has identified several hurdles to development in the City and has made several long-term and short-term recommendations to enhance development in the City, many of which have no or minimal cost; and

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WHEREAS, Mayor Street's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative calls for the construction of 16,000 new houses and to rehabilitate 2,500 others; and

WHEREAS, The City's current construction review process involves 14 city departments, agencies and boards, and the City's zoning code is 40-years-old, which has been layered with thousands of amendments; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia's middle-class only makes up approximately 19% of the City's population, a smaller population than three-fourths of the largest cities in the country, due, in part, to the lack of housing that is attractive to the middle-class; and

WHEREAS, Developers must often wait several months for the appropriate agencies to approve their plans and it has become routine and expected that the developer will have to appeal to the Zoning Board of Adjustment because zoning designations have not been updated; and,

WHEREAS, The City's current permit approval process does not currently track data that could be useful to improving the system: the types of permits requested, the time it takes development to get through each step in the process, the number of permits accepted or rejected, or the disposition of appeals before the ZBA; and

WHEREAS, Stormwater management is currently governed by three separate agencies, all of which have differing standards, which creates a barrier to development; and

WHEREAS, Modernizing the City's zoning and construction codes and streamlining the development review process could result in huge savings to the City. The National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards found that such measures can reduce costs by 60% without sacrificing safety or quality of life; and

WHEREAS, Similar municipalities like Chicago, Boston and Baltimore have rewritten their zoning codes, updated their plumbing codes, remapped their neighborhoods, automated their permitting system and specifically defined city agencies' roles; these cities have been rewarded with extraordinary growth, increasing their tax base, creating new jobs and lowering their regulating costs; now therefore

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes City Council's Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to hold public hearings to investigate the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia's recommendations to encourage new construction in the City.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the nineteenth of November, 2004.

Anna C. Verna
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Patricia Rafferty
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember DiCicco

Sponsored by: Councilmember DiCicco