

## Legislation Text

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**File #: 200569, Version: 0**

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October 15, 2020

**TO THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE  
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA:**

I write today to advise you that I am returning herewith to your Honorable Body as disapproved Bill No. 200094, passed by Council at its session on October 1, 2020 for the following reasons.

This bill is a second attempt to revise certain provisions of the Center City Overlay District by creating a Society Hill Overlay. The prior version of this bill (Bill No. 190830) was not returned with my signature before the expiration of the last Council term. In large part, this legislation is the same as its previous iteration and therefore in accordance with prior action, I am returning this legislation as disapproved.

Additionally, this measure was reviewed by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission staff and members, both in its current and previous forms. In both instances the consensus was a recommendation against approval due to their exclusionary natures and burdensome regulations.

It is these exclusionary natures that lie at the core of my disapproval for the legislation. The character of Society Hill, with its colonial rowhomes, pedestrian pathways, and strategically placed modern apartment towers is the result of Urban Renewal in the 1960's. Although more context sensitive than other urban renewal projects of the time, much of the social fabric and architectural history of Society Hill was erased to create the neighborhood we know today. Development in Society Hill is already subject to a multitude of controls including approval of the Philadelphia Historical Commission. This Bill creates additional overlay restrictions and exempts one neighborhood from multiple Historic Preservation measures added to the zoning code after the two-year Historic Preservation Task Force process. The additional height, parking, and signage controls are arbitrarily applied and will make further development and redevelopment in Society Hill more expensive, furthering the neighborhood's exclusivity at a time when preserving housing affordability in Philadelphia is a paramount concern. If this is permitted in one desirable neighborhood, it could easily spread to many other neighborhoods, pushing affordable housing units and the people who live in them out of sight and out of mind of higher-income Philadelphians.

In early September of this year, I released my revised priorities for my second term as Mayor. These revised priorities highlight my continuing commitment to a vision for true and lasting equity in Philadelphia. One key tenet of this vision is ensuring all Philadelphians have access to safe and affordable housing. I cannot sign legislation that could inhibit that vision. Now is the time for all of us, from my Administration to City Council, from the State delegation to our Federal partners, to step up and make historic, lasting change that will build a more just and equitable society for our residents.

Respectfully,

James F. Kenney  
Mayor