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Developing the Delaware

DESPITE THE ADVANTAGE OF ITS location between two major rivers, Philadelphia has been thwarted by a string of unfulfilled development plans for its waterfronts in recent decades, most notably at Penn's Landing on the central Delaware riverfront. Now, as new leaders begin to carry out a mandate for change in the city's planning and zoning, Philadelphia has finally begun to focus on the organized development of the Delaware River.

The most advanced and coherent development plans may be in the relatively overlooked northern Delaware riverfront, along an 11-mile (17.7-km) stretch between Center City and Bucks County. Development of several industrial waterfront sites on the Delaware north of Center City is underway, even without a legislated plan or a massive commitment of public funds. The former sites of a foundry, a warehouse, a shipping terminal, and a coke plant are being transformed into as many as 4,500 housing units as a new neighborhood develops adjacent to Philadelphia's Tacony and Bridesburg sections. In the development of Independence Pointe, Tacony Pointe, and the Philly Coke site, three developers plan to build mixed-use and residential communities that embrace a common goal: return the river to the people of Philadelphia.

"In the 20th century, the city turned its back on the river," says Janice Woodcock, executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. "For people in neighborhoods like Tacony, the Delaware [River] was a place where you worked, not where you went for recreation. The water was dirty and where you could get to the river at all, the sites were far from wel-

Waterfront development precipitates planning on Philadelphia's North Delaware River.



BARTONPARTNERS ARCHITECTS/PLANNERS

The Philadelphia "Vision" for the northern Delaware riverfront includes a greenway and bike path along the waterfront, which will be a component of both public and private development under special zoning for this section of the city.

coming." Even as industry left many of these sites and the river became cleaner, the routing of elevated Interstate 95 created a barrier between hundreds of thousands of northeast Philadelphia residents and their river. Though located just a few hundred yards from their homes, the Delaware lay beyond several lanes of interstate highway.

In 2001, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission published its vision—"North Delaware Waterfront: A Long-Term Vision for Renewal and Redevelopment"—setting goals and proposing strategies for planning reorientation of the land, for development of brownfields, and for construction of public

amenities. However, six years later, the Philadelphia municipal government has neither come up with public funding nor created a master plan to guide development of the area.

What the city did do last year was create Waterfront Redevelopment District (WRD) zoning for the North Delaware riverfront. Planning and architecture firm BartonPartners of Norristown, Pennsylvania; Pennoni Associates of Philadelphia; and Philadelphia law firm Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg & Ellers LLP worked together to develop a zoning overlay for private residential development, which was adopted by the city as a model for other new residential waterfront development. An

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essential first step in developing residential neighborhoods, where none existed before, had been taken.

In concert with the city's "vision" plan, any project governed by WRD zoning is to incorporate a 50-foot (15.2-m) waterfront setback from the river and a 20-foot (6.09-m) right-of-way, allowing for the creation of a river greenway. Aided by a state grant, construction has already begun on an 8.5-mile (13.7-km) footpath connecting the 1,600-acre (647-ha) Pennypack Park to the north with the mouth of Frankford Creek to the south. The greenway plan is being shepherded by the nonprofit Delaware River City Corporation.

Public involvement in the open space endeavor, says BartonPartners' principal Tom Barton, is critical. "The city can't expect developers to take on a huge cost component of infrastructure including public open spaces, road and utility improvements, and public recreation amenities, because the private investment market can't support public infrastructure development. It's already difficult to deliver homes at an attractive price in Philadelphia."

For developer Churchill Development Group, LLC, of Bridgewater, New Jersey, BartonPartners has revised an earlier, denser site plan for one that now proposes the development of approximately 1,200 residential units. The master plan for Independence Pointe epitomizes the focus on public access to the waterfront of "the New River City." "At Independence Pointe, we've designed a public esplanade and a bike path along the property's entire river frontage, as well as public parks, town squares, and landscaped gardens throughout the project," explains Barton.

Joe Logue, principal of Churchill Development Group, says the plan remains flexible because of his firm's commitment to meeting community needs. "We're proposing fewer high-density buildings than we did in an earlier version of the site plan. And," he adds, "I'm not averse to going smaller than 1,200 units if we can realize success with a different product mix. Since we are not a publicly traded company, we don't have to wring maximum revenue out of this site."

The plan is for each residential section to have a distinct look. The first phase includes 206 units contained within two-story brick

townhomes and two apartment-style condominium buildings with four stories above a parking level. The scale and orientation of the townhome, brownstone, and apartment construction are planned for maximizing the river view. The site plan includes the addition of an entrance, designed to minimize the I-95 overpass, with new streets and pathways serving formerly inaccessible areas of the 70-acre (28.3-ha) site and providing access from adjoining parcels, including Pennypack on the Delaware Park.

For Logue, who is Philadelphia born and bred, there was no learning curve when it came to this project. "Tacony is not a gentrified city neighborhood. It's a section of Philadelphia that has been underappreciated.

restaurants, retailers, and banks to provide some essential services for the existing Tacony neighborhood and Independence Pointe residents. There also are longer-term plans for Independence Pointe that may include integration of a wellness center and rehabilitation facility complemented by a small hotel.

BartonPartners is also contributing to the planning and design of Tacony Pointe at Milnor Street and Princeton Avenue in Philadelphia. The site is approved to include as many as 500 units, but fewer are expected to be built in order to preserve an appealing, appropriate density. "We've designed stacked and traditional townhomes that are consistent with the architectural character of the residential Tacony neighborhood on the other side



The Delaware riverfront, one of Philadelphia's greatest resources, is in the midst of a conversion from industrial to residential use. Shown here are site plans for Independence Pointe (above) and Tacony Pointe (right).

Our project's mixed flats and townhomes will appeal to the first-time homebuyer with outdoor amenities like basketball courts, pools, and a tot lot, which will form the hub of the neighborhood." Logue says he anticipates that the largest units on the site will sell for no more than \$350,000 for two-story, 2,400-square-foot (223-sq-m) townhomes. "We want to develop a community for all ages and generations." This, he notes, means mixed products and mixed pricing.

The first Independence Pointe neighborhood will be near the site's western entrance. The entry complex comprises a broad landscaped boulevard, as well as commercial space for tenants including res-



