

## Glossary of Development Terms

**Affordable Housing:** Housing in which the occupant is paying no more than 30% of income for housing costs. Affordable housing is an umbrella term-- it includes public housing (see below), subsidized housing (see below), and housing for people with Section 8 vouchers (see below), but it's just a general descriptor for housing that costs 30% or below of household income. Most affordable housing in Philadelphia is rental housing, and most is aimed at serving residents at or below 80% of Area Median Income (see below). The most common way to make housing affordable is through government subsidies (including deferrable loans, grants, and tax credits), but any landlord can choose to price their units at affordable rates.

**Appraisal:** A valuation of property, such as real estate, a business, or object, by the estimate of an authorized person. In Philadelphia, the Office of Property Assessment (OPA) determines what every piece of property within Philadelphia is worth. The assessed dollar value is used to calculate the property's real estate tax due.

**Area Median Income:** The midpoint of an area's income distribution, where 50 percent of households earn above the median figure while 50 percent earn less than the median. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates AMI for U.S. metropolitan areas on an annual basis. Currently, the "area" being measured is Philadelphia county. Some people believe that determining affordability based on region-wide incomes disadvantages lower-income residents, because the AMI skews higher when it includes wealthy suburbs.

The AMI in Philadelphia for a one-person household is \$79,000. Most households in Mantua are between 30-60% of Philadelphia's AMI. The median household income in Mantua has remained around \$27,000 over the last few years. To access the most up-to-date AMI information from HUD, please visit: [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2023/select\\_Geography.odn](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2023/select_Geography.odn)

**Blight:** Can be a general term to describe abandoned houses, vacant lots, and other signs of infrastructural neglect. At the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, blight is a technical term that is only given to an area if certain criteria are met.

**Block Captain:** An individual elected by their block to help keep their block clean by organizing clean-ups and conducting other activities on their block. To find out if your block has a block captain, contact the Streets Department.

**By-Right Development:** Development that conforms to zoning and building codes and therefore does not require a variance. The developer is still required to obtain a zoning permit, but they do not need to go through the Zoning Board of Adjustment (see below).

**Charrette:** An intensive planning session where citizens, designers and others collaborate on a vision for a development project.

**Civic Association:** An organization whose official goal is to improve a neighborhood through volunteer work by its members. The Mantua Civic Association is located at 3729 Melon St, Philadelphia, PA 19104, and more information can be found at <https://www.mantuacivic.org/>.

**Community Benefits Agreement (CBA):** A contract between a developer and community-based organizations representing residents' interests, which spells out the benefits the community will receive in return for supporting the developer's project in their neighborhood (e.g. guaranteed minimums for local hiring, inclusion of affordable units in new housing, or improvement of parks or community facilities). The local CBA is the Mantua Powelton Alliance.

**Community Development Corporation (CDC):** A non-profit organization serving a specific neighborhood or neighborhoods. CDCs support improvements that benefit neighborhood residents, often focusing on serving lower-income areas. CDC can be involved in many areas including job and business creation, education, affordable housing development, neighborhood planning projects, providing services directly to residents, and more. Nearby CDCs include Mt. Vernon Manor CDC, HopePHL CDC, and Centennial Parkside CDC.

**Comprehensive Plan:** A city plan developed that outlines future development with attention to preserving existing character and assets. A comprehensive plan does not call for any specific action or laws. Instead, it assesses the current conditions and provides a vision that can help dictate transportation, land use, parks and open space, historic preservation, job and business growth, and housing. Philadelphia's current comprehensive plan is called "Philadelphia 2035."

**Councilperson (or Councilman or Councilwoman):** A member of City Council, the elected body in Philadelphia that has the power to make laws. There are ten members elected by geographic district and seven at-large members elected by the entire City. Mantua is in the 3rd District, and the 3rd District Councilperson is Jamie Gauthier.

**Developer:** A person or organization who makes improvements to a parcel of land. An improvement could mean a new building or changes to an existing structure, or landscape improvements. A for-profit developer is an individual or entity that aims to generate profit through real estate rentals or sales. A non-profit developer does not generate profit from rent or home sales, which makes it easier for them to keep rents and prices affordable.

**Development:** The process of constructing a new building, rehabilitating an existing building, or improving land to be sold, rented, or occupied by the developer. The terms "development" and "redevelopment" are often used interchangeably.

**Disinvestment:** A lack of investment by the government and/or the private sector in a given area, leading to deterioration of the physical environment and of the quality of services.

**Easement:** A grant of property rights, such as permission to build a greenway, given by a property owner to another person or entity.

**Economic Development:** Programs and policies that attempt to improve the economic well-being of a community by creating jobs, increasing businesses, and raising incomes.

**Estate Planning:** Preparation of someone's financial situation in the event of their incapacitation or death. This process can include planning for assets to be passed down to heirs, the settlement of debts, the guardianship of minors, etc. Estate planning is something that people of all income levels should consider—especially because it can help prevent tangled titles (see below) of homes.

\*A note on wills and trusts, which can both be part of an estate planning process: A will is a legal document that spells out how someone wants their affairs handled and assets distributed after they die, and it takes effect at the time of death. A trust is a legal arrangement whereby a grantor (also called a trustor) gives a trustee the right to hold and manage assets for the benefit of a specific purpose or person. Trusts can be in effect during life and after death. When creating a will or a trust, you should consult tax, investment, and legal advisors.

**Equity:** The amount a property is currently worth, minus the amount of any existing mortgage or lien on the property.

**Equitable Development:** An approach to planning that supports and empowers underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities, correct past harms, and create fair futures. Proponents of equitable development advocate for affordable housing, better transportation options, and access to health and safety resources.

**Frontage:** The length of a building or lot that runs parallel to a public street or alley.

**Gentrification:** The process whereby the character of a lower-income neighborhood is changed by wealthier people moving in. Often, this process begins with an increase in developers turning vacant land or neglected housing into high-end rental apartments that attract wealthier residents. As real estate prices increase in the neighborhood, lower-income residents are often forced to move because they can no longer afford to live there.

**Housing Authority:** Typically a public entity that governs aspects of housing—subsidized housing, especially. The Philadelphia Housing Authority is a municipal authority providing public housing services in Philadelphia. It is the fourth-largest housing authority in the United States and is the largest landlord in Pennsylvania.

**Land Survey:** A mechanism for accurately measuring the dimensions of a particular area of land, often required before a development can begin.

**Land Use:** Describes how a parcel of land is used. Different kinds of land use include residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, recreational, parks, and schools. Zoning is what determines which land uses are permitted on each parcel in the city.

**Lien:** A legal claim on a property that grants the issuer of the lien a specified amount of money when the owner sells the property for any debts owed. Liens can be placed on properties for unpaid property taxes, federal income taxes, contractors, or fines from Licenses & Inspection.

**Market-Rate Housing:** Housing with a price generated by the real estate market without direct subsidy. Philadelphia's market rates have jumped considerably over the last 10 years.

**Master Plan:** Some cities use "master plan" and "comprehensive plan" interchangeably. In Philadelphia, they mean different things. A Master Plan is a long-range plan for a specific area, institution, or amenity, such as the Philadelphia Trail Master Plan regarding bike and pedestrian trails, or the Drexel University Campus Master Plan regarding Drexel's campus.

**Mixed-Use Building:** A property containing some combination of residential, commercial, and/or industrial spaces.

**Mixed-Income Housing:** Housing developments that include units for people with a range of income levels. Mixed-income housing may include luxury, market-rate, and affordable units.

**Multifamily Housing:** Any residential property containing more than one housing unit. A duplex, townhome or apartment complex is a good example of a multifamily home.

**Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC):** An organization that has a contract with the City of Philadelphia to provide social service and employment assistance. Organizations with NAC contracts have volunteer advisory committees comprised of local residents.

**Neighborhood Plan:** A plan for improving and preserving a neighborhood, developed by residents, community development corporations, business and property owners, and planning professionals. The We are Mantua! Transformation Plan (2013) is the most recent neighborhood plan for Mantua.

**Placemaking:** A creative approach to the design and management of public spaces, which highlights a community's assets and character to improve vitality and promote connectivity.

**Public Housing:** Housing owned by a government entity—typically, either the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or a city's Housing Authority.

**Registered Community Organization (RCO):** Organizations that host public meetings regarding requests for zoning variances. The RCO meeting allows neighbors to provide input on-- and vote in favor or against-- the requested variance. A developer or their representative presents the proposed development to meeting attendees who then vote to support or reject the project. The RCO then relays the community's comments and voting results to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (see below). The ZBA will then take the community's vote into account when making a final decision about a variance. The RCOs for this area are the Mantua Civic Association, Belmont Alliance Civic Association, and Centennial Parkside CDC.

**Reverse Mortgage:** A special type of home loan only for homeowners who are 62 and older. Like a traditional mortgage, reverse mortgages allow homeowners to borrow money using their home as security for the loan, with interest and fees added to the loan balance each month. However, unlike a traditional mortgage, borrowers of reverse mortgage loans don't make monthly mortgage payments. The loan, interest, and fees are repaid when the borrower no longer lives in the home—usually, when the home is sold. If you get a reverse mortgage, you can't lose your house to foreclosure the way you could with a home equity loan.

Note: it's important to be aware of potential scams. Watch out for anyone who offers you "bargain loans." If you need a loan, it's best to start by asking a local bank, credit union, or mortgage company. Before borrowing money, know exactly what the lender is offering. You have a legal right to know the total cost of the loan, the annual percentage rate, the monthly payments, and how long you have to pay back the loan. A loan with a lower monthly payment is not always the better deal; it may have a high balloon payment that is due in a few years.

You have a three-day right to cancel a reverse mortgage. Please seek legal help immediately if you are in this window and wish to cancel. You can also locate counselors certified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by calling 1-888-466-3487. We suggest speaking with a lawyer or a financial adviser about whether a reverse mortgage is right for you.

**Section 8:** Refers to Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937, which authorizes the government to provide rental assistance to landlords on behalf of low-income households. This is also known as the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. The recipient of the voucher may choose any housing that meets the program requirements, and a housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the Housing Authority on behalf of the voucher recipient. The recipient then pays the difference between the actual rent charged and the amount subsidized by the program.

In Philadelphia, it is illegal to deny a person housing based on source of income, which includes housing assistance programs. If you are a voucher holder and you have been rejected by a landlord, you may have experienced discrimination based on your source of income. You should contact Community Legal Services or another legal aid organization for assistance.

**Setback:** The required minimum distance between a building and its closest property line, a street, or any other place which is deemed to need protection.

**Single-Family Housing:** A free-standing residential building intended to house one household.

**Subsidized Housing:** Federal, state or local government programs that reduce the cost of housing for low-and moderate-income residents. Housing can be subsidized in numerous ways— for example, giving tenants a rent voucher, providing homebuyers with downpayment assistance, or offering deferred loans or tax credits to developers. Subsidized simply means that rents are reduced because of a particular government program-- it has nothing to do with the quality or type of housing, nor whether it is publicly or privately owned.

**Tangled Title:** A legal issue where a person who owns a property does not have their name on the deed. This can happen when a home is inherited from a relative who did not change the deed before they passed away, and in certain rent-to-own agreements and cash home sales. Tangled titles are a large issue in West Philadelphia, and they put property owners at risk of losing homes they've lived in for decades. If you are dealing with or want to prevent a tangled title issue, you should contact your Councilmember's office, a Community Development Corporation, or a legal aid organization.

**Upzoning/Downzoning:** Upzoning refers to changes to a zoning code that increases the density of development allowed. Downzoning is a change to the code that reduces density.

**Zoning:** A set of laws that restrict and define the type of land uses (e.g., commercial, residential, industrial, etc.) and details of development that can occur on each parcel of land. This includes things like height and bulk of buildings, occupancy density, parking requirements, distance from roads, etc. Zoning typically divides an area into districts that group compatible uses together and exclude incompatible uses, for example, separating industrial areas and residential areas. These districts are known as the "base zoning" or "base district" for each parcel and area.

**Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA):** An independent board within the Department of Planning and Development that is responsible for reviewing requests for zoning variances (see below). The ZBA hears appeals of any decision made by Licenses & Inspection in accordance with the Philadelphia Zoning Code. Information about ZBA hearings—including information on how to join a public hearing—can be found on the ZBA's website.

**Zoning Code:** The document that defines the different zoning designations for parcels in a city, contains all regulations for each designation, and describes procedures for compliance.

**Zoning Variance:** Permission to build something with dimensions or a use that does not conform to the existing zoning requirements for that parcel. This can be requested after the Department of License and Inspections denies a zoning permit application. To obtain a variance, the property owner must meet with the local RCO and attend a public hearing with the ZBA. A variance may be granted by the ZBA if the specific condition on the parcel of land would cause the property owner difficulty and hardship. Example: an affordable housing developer wants to build a duplex on a parcel, but the parcel is zoned single-family. The developer presents this proposal to community residents at an RCO meeting, and the RCO votes in favor of this development. Then, at the ZBA hearing, the ZBA members take the community's feedback into account and grant the developer a variance to proceed with the duplex on the parcel.

*This guide was created by Mt. Vernon Manor CDC, using language and information from the Citizen's Planning Institute, Planetizen, Investopedia, and HUD. For more information, check out the Citizen's Planning Institute, the West Philadelphia Community Power Academy, the Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities, and the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations.*