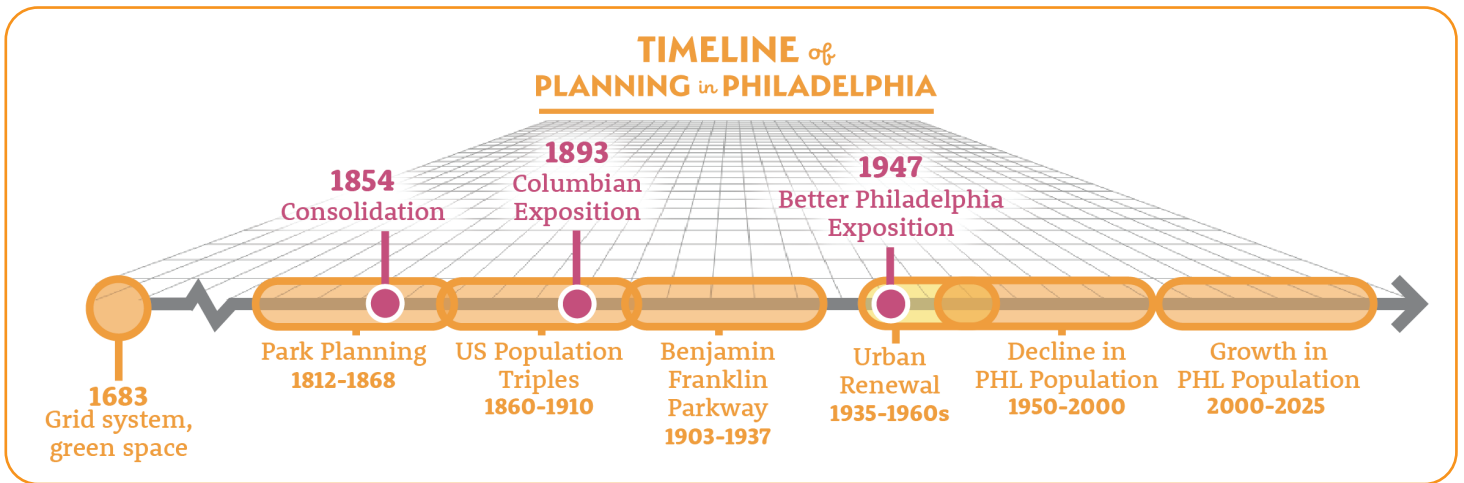




Philadelphia's Planning History



This booklet is a short guide to the history and context of city planning in Philadelphia.

Refer to the timeline above for the events and eras referred to in this book. Find the insert inside this booklet and complete the exercise with a group.

EARLY HISTORY

pre-1700's

The indigenous people of the land that became Philadelphia were the Lenape (also Lenni Lenape; their English moniker was “Delaware”). They were displaced by Quakers and other religious minorities that settled the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the late 17th and 18th centuries.

Archeological evidence indicates that the Lenape inhabited the area centuries before the Europeans arrived. They established various villages along the Schuylkill River and its tributaries. The Lenape utilized natural resources to build their homes, single doorway wooden huts called wigwams, along rivers and creeks.

(continued)

EARLY HISTORY

The Dutch and Swedes had episodic relations with the Lenape. The English Quaker William Penn would have more enduring and impactful interactions. In 1682, Penn came to the Delaware River valley to claim lands granted to him on a proprietary basis by King Charles II of England and to establish a haven in the New World for fellow members of the persecuted Quaker sect. He came to take possession of lands that reached throughout southeast Pennsylvania where the Lenape resided.

The Quakers believed strongly in the principles of goodwill and friendship and Penn practiced these principles with the Lenape. Penn was determined to treat them as brothers and sisters as he believed they too were children of God. He entered into purchase agreements with the Lenape that brought lands deeded to his proprietorship under his absolute title. Although he took ownership rights, he still recognized and reserved certain lands where Lenape villages were located, not allowing them to be sold. Peaceful relations between the European settlers and the Lenape would disintegrate, however, not long after Penn's death in 1718.

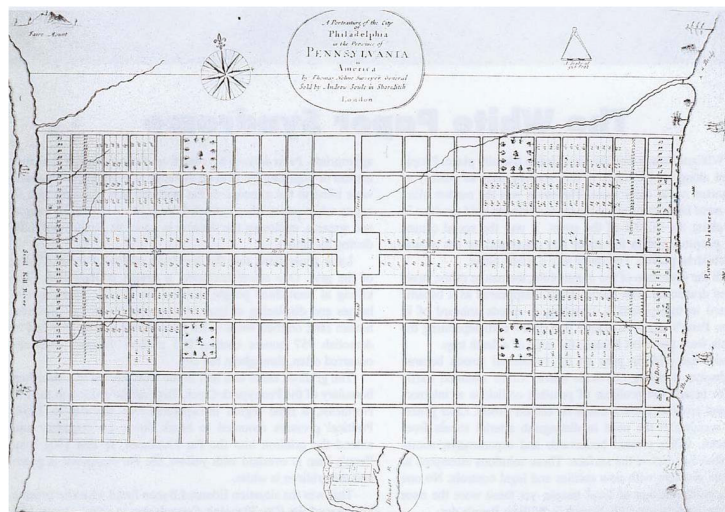
COLONIAL HISTORY

1854
Consolidation



1683
Grid system,
green space

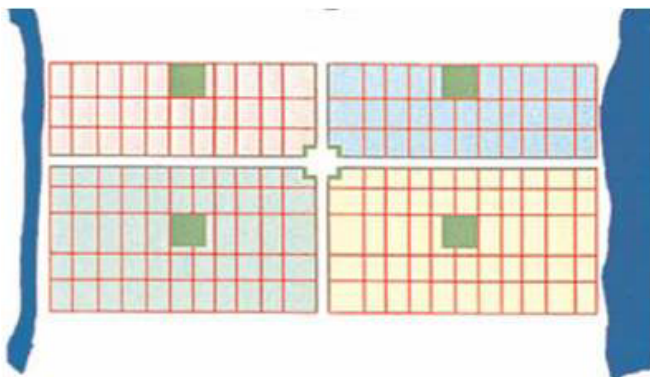
Philadelphia is grounded in planning with this original plan by William Penn and his chief surveyor, Thomas Holme. Philadelphia stretched from Vine Street to South (Cedar) Street, river to river. This was the city until the middle of the 19th century. Penn witnessed the great fire in London and wanted to create a new community that would not suffer the same fate. He and Holme laid out the grid of streets and from day-one incorporated civic space and green space. He also declared that no wood structures could be built - again for fire safety - so even from the very beginning we had brick and stone buildings.



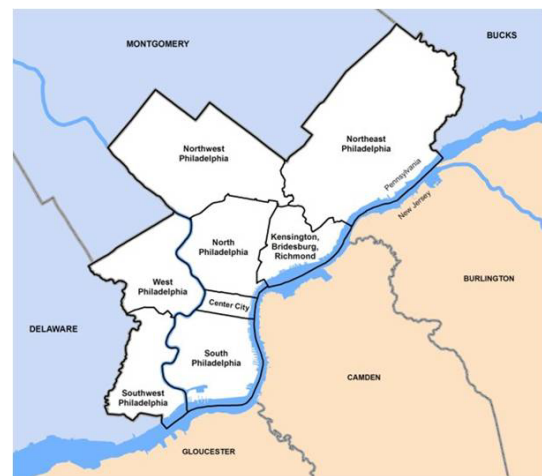
William Penn and Thomas Horne. A "Greene Countrie Towne:" Planning for a New City (1683)

Below on the left you see a diagram of the four quadrants in Center City, between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers, that reflect Penn's plan, organized around city "squares" or parks, which still exist today. The center square was set aside for civic uses. In the early 19th century, it was the site of a water pumping station. In 1871, the present City Hall building construction began.

By the mid-19th century Philadelphia was teeming with residents, businesses and industry. The surrounding townships and neighborhoods were also growing but many were struggling. The consolidation of 1854 merged the boundaries of the County of Philadelphia with the City of Philadelphia. A major driver for this was the need for municipal services – not all areas had a police force or fire fighters or a department that built and repaired roads. The consolidation ensured that these types of services extended throughout the area.



Philadelphia 4 Quadrant plan of Center City



"Consolidated" Philadelphia today

PARKS & SANITATION

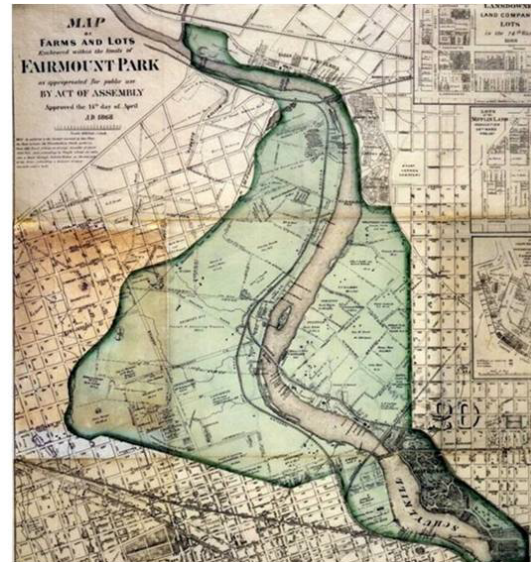
Park Planning 1812-1868
US Population Triples 1860-1910



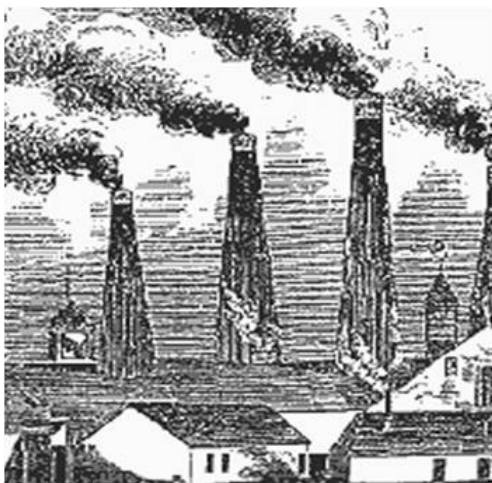
Crowded homes in New York City

From 1860-1910 the population of the US tripled in size. Cities stretched to accommodate these millions and deteriorated in the process.

People were beginning to make the connection between clean drinking water and uses along the rivers that provided that water. Through the 19th century, there was a regional effort to limit toxic uses along the Schuylkill River (such as factories and tanneries). The city slowly purchased land on either side of the river to preserve it and limit what was happening along its banks. The Fairmount Park system was founded on this principle.



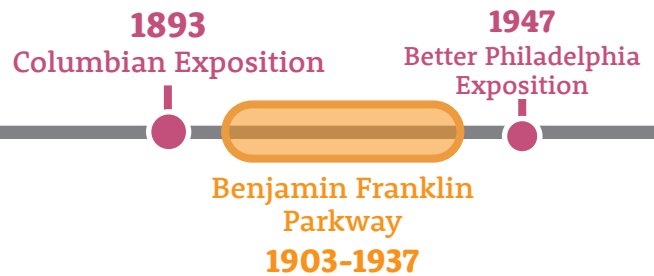
1812-1868 - "Faire Mount:" Planning for Clean Water and Open Space



In the 1930's the city created the first comprehensive plan for future development. This was the basis of the first zoning code. Zoning provided a legal way to regulate what building uses can go where.

CITY BEAUTIFUL

The City Beautiful Movement was meant to deal with these rising issues of sanitation, crime, and over-population of cities. Nothing captured this better than the Columbian Exposition (also known as the Chicago World's Fair) of 1893. The lakefront showcase was visited by more than 27 million people—half the US population at that time!—and left with different expectations of what a city could be.



Chicago World's Fair, 1893

The Parkway

Philadelphia was also influenced by the City Beautiful movement and this spurred the vision of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The vision wasn't just a boulevard that connected City Hall to the park, but to also be lined with institutions and museums that would help educate the public. Much of that vision has been realized:

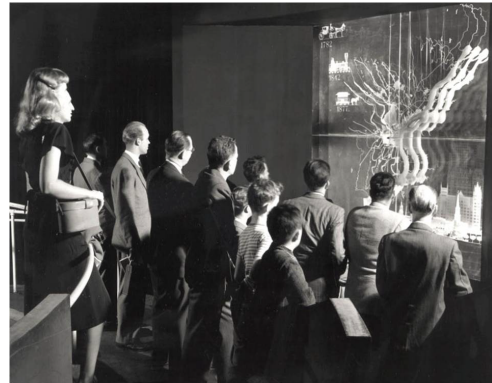
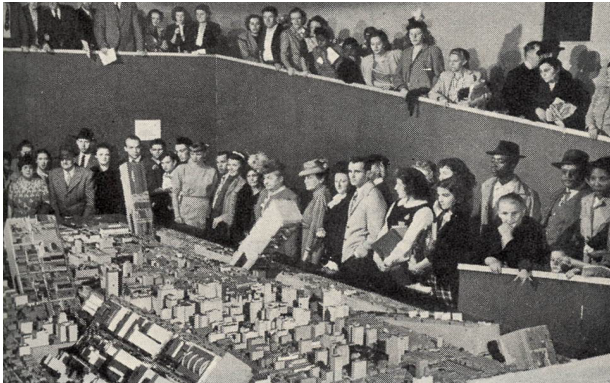


1903-1937 "The Parkway: Planning Against the Street Grid"



Modern-day Benjamin Franklin Parkway

Better Philadelphia Exhibition



Showcase: 13 sections that rotated to display a model of how Center City could look by 1982

At mid-century, Philadelphia was at the forefront of a new movement to get citizens involved in the planning of their city. Professional planners had a more important role in the postwar years of optimistic growth, instead of wholesale demolition, as was happening in New York and Chicago. The 1947 "Better Philadelphia Exhibition" took up two floors of Gimbel's Department Store and attracted 385,000 visitors. The theme was "What City Planning Means to You and Your Children" and contained movies, murals, and a fourteen foot long rotating model of how Center City could look by the year 1982 (the city's 300th birthday).

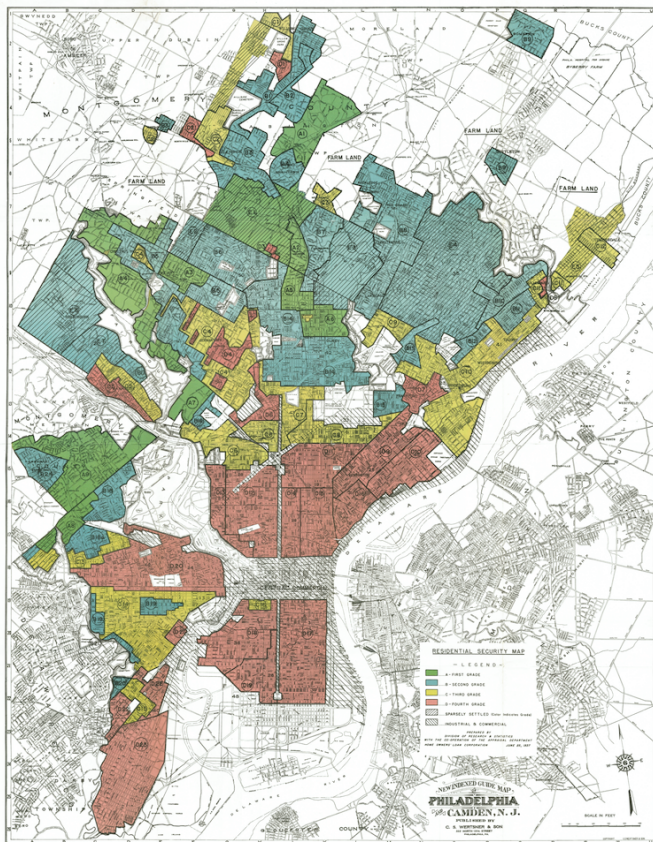
REDLINING and URBAN RENEWAL

1947
Better Philadelphia Exposition



Urban Renewal
1935-1960s

Redlining



Beginning in 1935, the Federal Home Owners Loan Corporation sent people out to rate neighborhoods to guide investment in new 30 year mortgages backed by the federal government. The ratings system gave low grades for areas with old buildings and high percentages of foreign born, Jewish or Negro residents, all considered “undesirable racial elements.”

Maps were developed by the federal government’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation using demographic maps provided by cities, including from the City of Philadelphia. Majority Black neighborhoods were characterized as “hazardous” and marked in red on the map. Banks would not offer mortgages in these “redlined” areas. Residents in redlined areas were financially trapped, shut out from opportunities to build capital through home equity and disinvested by Federal programs that

shifted towards investing in the suburbs. Many of these redlined areas remain poorer, Blacker, and with more crime, worse schools, and fewer employment opportunities.

The Federal Housing Administration explicitly discriminated against Blacks in underwriting insurance and loans. Subsidized housing developments for whites-only. FHA’s Underwriting Manual instructed banks to steer clear of areas with “inharmonious racial groups”, recommended that municipalities enact restrictive zoning ordinances, and suggested highways were a good way to separate white and Black neighborhoods.

For more information about redlining, see this excellent video:



segregatedbydesign.com

Urban Renewal

Under the Federal Housing Act of 1949, cities were able to declare areas “blighted,” that allowed them to use the land using powers of eminent domain to raze low-income neighborhoods for infrastructure, public housing, and “economic development” projects, known as urban renewal. Under urban renewal, 2,500 projects were carried out in 993 American cities, displacing approximately one million people. Seventy-five percent of those displaced were people of color. Many of the neighborhoods subjected to urban renewal were formerly redlined. Therefore, residents in these areas were poor because they were systematically excluded from government-backed financing available elsewhere, and then uprooted from their neighborhoods because they were denied financial tools to maintain their homes.

Urban Renewal manifested in Philadelphia in different ways. In 1960’s West Philadelphia, universities, hospitals, and business leaders came together to form the West Philadelphia Corporation (WPC) that created a plan for expanding universities and creating the University City Science Center in a working-class Black neighborhood formerly known as Black Bottom.



Typical “slum clearance,” aerial view

Under the leadership of Ed Bacon, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission put forward a plan to revitalize the Society Hill neighborhood. PCPC calculated that a third of existing residents, who could not afford to bring their homes into compliance with the Commission’s vision for the neighborhood, would be displaced. Executive Director Bacon felt that “it was more important to restore the area than to maintain the low-income residents”.

Highway Development



Highway construction in Wilmington, Delaware. Highways were also a tool of Urban Renewal, combining “slum clearance” with a connection to less crowded suburbs, with the added effect of clearing and bisecting “blighted” neighborhoods.

As early as the 1940s, freeways were seen as solutions to a perceived problem of urban slums with blighted housing. The federal government’s willingness to minimize the impact of highway construction depended on the neighborhood in which the highway was located. In mostly white Society Hill, \$9 million was spent to build a cap over two-and-a-half blocks of I-95. In mostly Black Nicetown, a less-destructive route for US Route 1 was rejected because it would have cost \$4-6 million more.

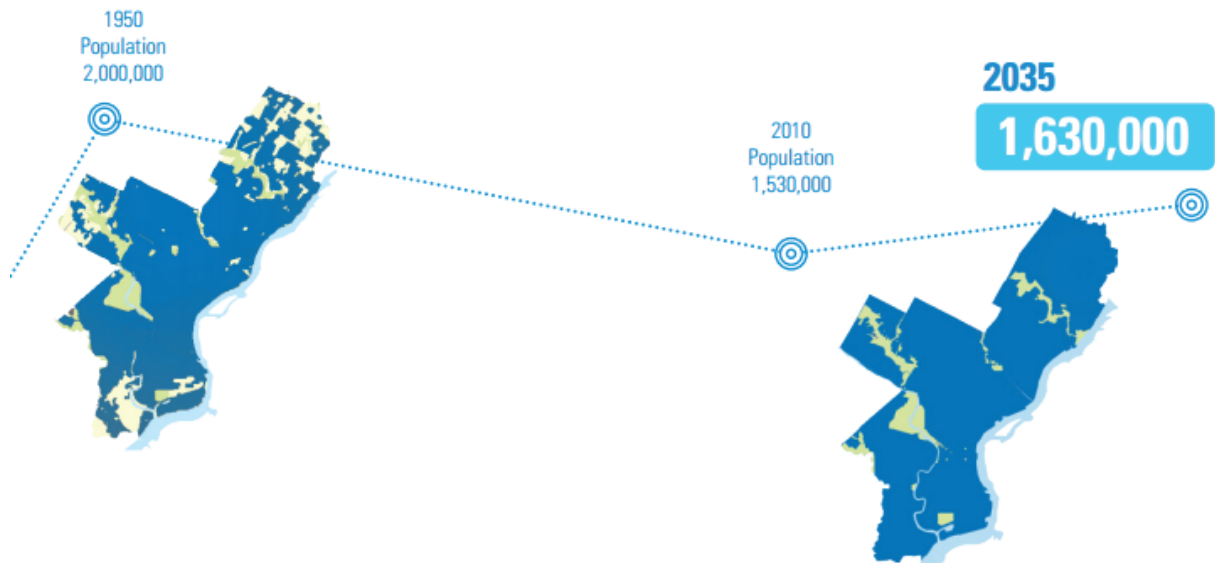
POPULATION DECLINE

Decline in
Phila. Population
1950-2000

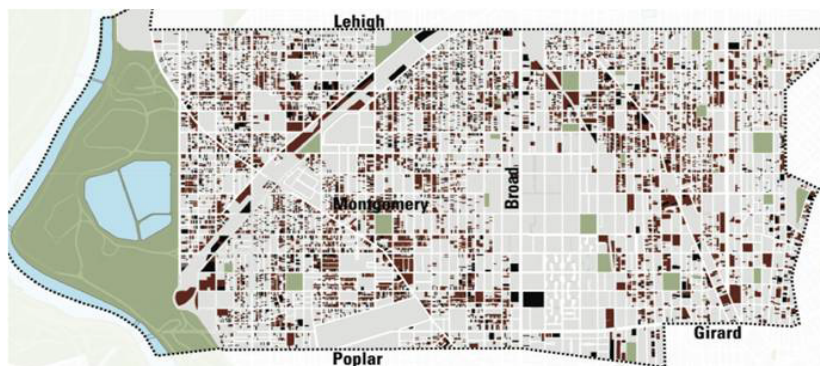
Growth in
Phila. Population
2000-2025

In 1960, the Planning Commission undertook a new comprehensive plan for the City of Philadelphia. At the time, the population was about 2 million people and that plan projected growth of 500,000. As a result, the city built new facilities, such as fire houses, libraries, and recreation centers to meet the expected growth in population. The far northeast and southwest sections of the city were developed to help meet the demand for more suburban style housing.

What actually happened was a decline of about 500,000 people. So today we are left with an infrastructure that does not have the population to support it.



We now are dealing with a legacy of population loss and vacancy. **There are over 40,000 vacant lots in the city.** While the city's population is slowly on the upswing (projected growth of +100,000 over the next 25 years), we will not have the population to occupy all of the land we have today. The Land Bank is envisioned to be one way to put vacant land and buildings back to use in the most beneficial way for the surrounding communities, but this remains a challenge.



Visualization of Vacant Lots