

OCTOBER 3, 2017 | Independence Visitors Center

The first of two public listening sessions for the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Task Force took place on October 3, 2017, at the Independence Visitors Center. The meeting attracted over 175 attendees.

This meeting served a dual purpose—the first was to educate the public about the Task Force, and how the public can get involved. The second was to obtain community input on preservation preferences and values to create a foundation for the Task Force's report. After a presentation about the Task Force, their work, and a project schedule, city staff and Task Force members led small groups in table exercises to garner community input. The group exercises enabled residents to share their values on preservation. Groups were asked to identify what makes Philadelphia uniquely Philadelphia, impart where they fall on a scale of preservation, and share what the term “historic preservation” means to them.

The results of the group exercises are summarized on the following pages. The feedback obtained from this exercise will inform the recommendations for the Task Force's final report.

The next public listening session will be held in Fall 2018.





What makes Philadelphia uniquely Philadelphia?

Many of the answers from the various tables were similar or the same and these have been combined with a total number of mentions noted.

Architectural significance – 32 answers

buildings and sites, integrity, variety, red brick (fireproof), City Hall, boat house row, covering all eras, unique features such as the viaduct

History – 29 answers

birthplace of the nation, layers of history, World Heritage city

Culture of neighborhoods – 27 mentions

city of neighborhoods, stoops, rowhouse, know your neighbors, sense of community, diversity, pride, unique, distinctness, character, social and political uniqueness (present and historic), active neighborhood organizations, growing immigrant populations

“Green Country Town” – 21 mentions

intimacy, natural setting, parks, green space improvements, horticulture and landscapes, Fairmount Park, largest park system (9,000 acres), unique park system, neighborhood parks, squares, lack of green space

Attitude – 19 answers

grittiness, Rocky statue, authentic, loyal fans, working class, mix of generations, accent, self-deprecating, welcoming and friendly

Walkable – 13 mentions

Grid – 12 answers

network of little streets, Penn’s plan, historic transportation Infrastructure, Broad Street -longest street in the world

Culture and arts – 12 answers

museums, sculptures, Broad Street, murals, public art, Free Library system, movies filmed here, good records and archives

Culturally significant – 11 answers

identity – pride in place, strength, independent communities that came together, diverse

Rowhouses – 11 mentions

small properties, variety, density

Scale – 11 answers

texture, mix of buildings, height restrictions, human-scaled

City of firsts – 10 answers

bank, university, hospital, library, zoo

Industrial legacy – 9 answers

“Workshop of the World,” inventions, industrial stock

Government impediments – 7 mentions

councilmanic prerogative, civic corruption, politicians, one party city

City of churches – 7 mentions

Quakers, religious tolerance

Endless events – 7 mentions

entertainment, traditions like Mummers parade, 4th July, Broad Street run

Foodie town – 6 answers

restaurants, cheese steaks

Rivers – 5 mentions

between two rivers, natural features, creeks, Heinz Wildlife Preserve

Affordable housing – 5 answers

homeownership, economic heritage

Universities – 5 answers

Tourist mecca – 5 mentions

things to do, always more to discover, historic markers, landmarks, Liberty Bell

Hospitals – 4 mentions

health care industry, five medical schools

Weak preservation code – 3 mentions

Poor enforcement

Small town feeling – 3 answers

largest small town in US

Two mentions:

*Non-profit agencies
Unused land, vacant buildings
Driving culture
Wissahickon schist
Poorest big city
Livable Areas
South Philly parking
Ease of movement, centrally located to rest of world*

One mention:

*Growth of Center City
Poor public education
Private schools
Navy Yard
Private clubs and organizations
Farming
Largest airport expansion
Predominance of unions*



What does 'Historic Preservation' mean to you?

PRESERVING CHARACTER, BUILDINGS, AESTHETICS

- Preserving existing things
- Preserve character of neighborhoods
- Saving character

RESPECTING/PRESERVING HISTORY, THE PAST AND STORIES

- Respecting the past
- Reverence of history
- Maintaining our history

PRESERVING WORKMANSHIP, TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS

- Saving our past in the form of materials
- Appreciating workmanship
- Preserve arch techniques

PRESERVING COMMUNITIES, VALUES AND A SENSE OF PLACE

- Sense of place
- Integrity of community
- Not losing the good thoughts of the past

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND REUSE

- Reuse of existing resources
- Adaptive reuse
- Sustainability

MAINTENANCE

- Maintain original façades
- Retaining historic character for the future
- Good maintenance is preservation

TOURISM AND EDUCATION

- Maintaining resources for tourists & new residents
- Historical education and protecting irreplaceable assets

ECONOMICS OF PRESERVATION

- Economic resource
- Unrealized opportunity
- Preserves neighborhoods, lasts longer, increases value of property

MANAGING CHANGE

- Continuity
- Change
- Careful management of change, not its cessation

LEAVING A LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

- City will be here long after we're gone
- A legacy for the future
- Snapshot of time

REGULATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT

- Inclusive and trusted standards for worthiness
- Historic preservation is in the Pennsylvania Constitution as a right

CONFLICT OVER TERM AND PRACTICES

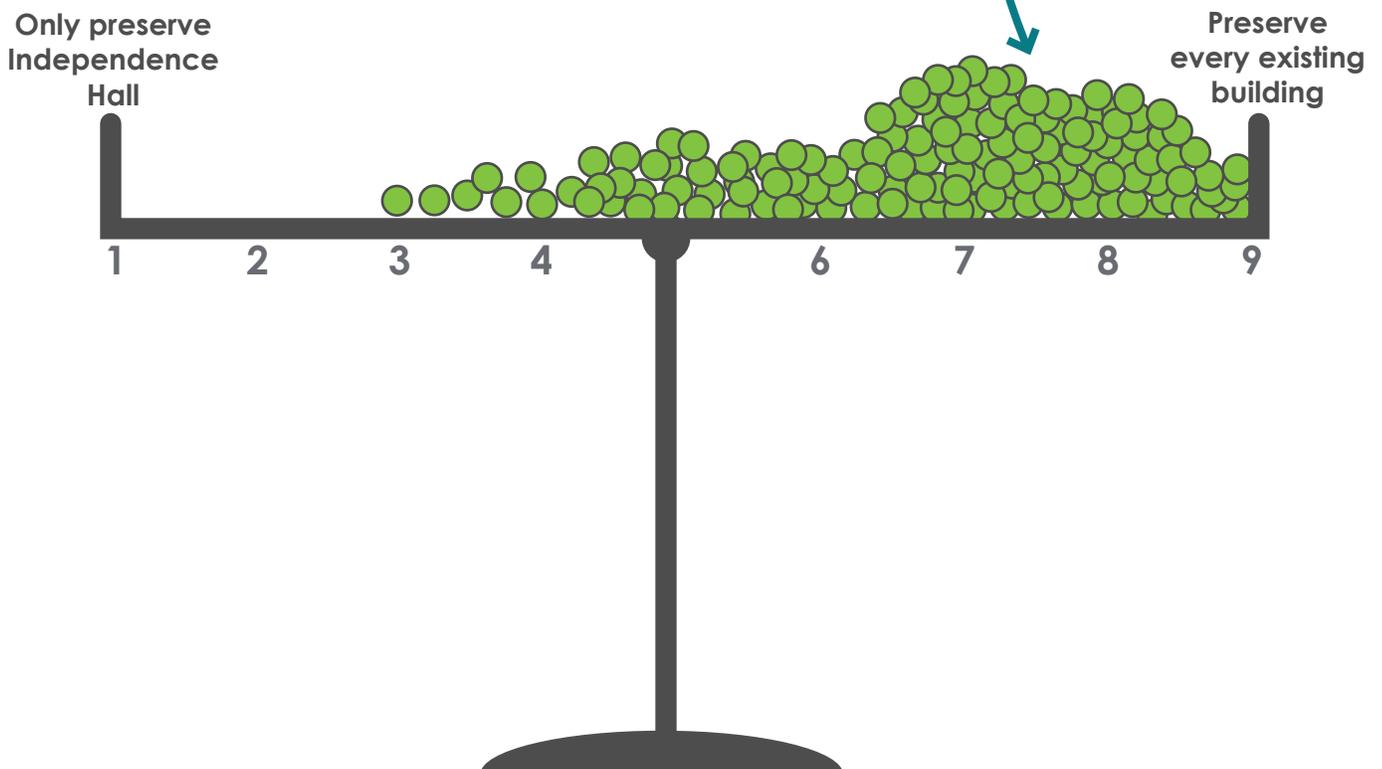
- Who's history?
- Differing visions
- Different neighborhoods and may not work together

This is just a summary of comments received. If you would like a complete listing of all comments, please email your request to preservation@phila.gov.

What do you value?

This exercise asked participants to share their values on a simplified preservation vs. development scale. One end of the scale was "Preserve Everything", as all sites speak to the history and culture of Philadelphia and its neighborhoods. The opposite end represented a counter view that only new construction and investment will keep Philadelphia vibrant and growing, therefore only save Independence Hall and nothing else. Participants had to determine where on this scale their values fall, and place a dot accordingly. They then also shared with the group why they chose that location on the scale.

58% of participants ranked themselves 7 or 8 on the preservation values scale



5 most common answers for each position on scale

SCALE 3: 0.7% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Change and development are inevitable

SCALE 4: 5% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Balance preservation with development
- Should adaptively reuse old buildings
- Cultural significance can change over time
- City needs growth and development
- Preservation can be an impediment to new things

SCALE 5: 15% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Neighborhood-specific preservation practices
- Should be a mix of old and new architecture
- Rehab/reuse comes with cost & health issues
- More stringent requirements for new construction
- Preservation supports economic development

SCALE 6: 14% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Should be a mix of old and new architecture
- More stringent requirements for new construction
- Should adaptively reuse old buildings
- Attractive reuse and maintenance incentives
- Rehab/reuse comes with cost & health issues

SCALE 7: 32% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Preserve buildings to preserve character/identity/history of neighborhoods/the city
- Should adaptively reuse old buildings
- Attractive reuse and maintenance incentives
- Old buildings are better quality than new
- Neighborhood-specific preservation practices

SCALE 8: 25% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Preservation needs work and prioritization
- Too much demolition
- Attractive reuse and maintenance incentives
- Preserve buildings to preserve character
- More stringent requirements for new construction

SCALE 9: 5% OF PARTICIPANTS

- Preserve buildings to preserve character/identity/history of neighborhoods/the city
- Preservation needs work and prioritization
- Too much demolition
- Attractive reuse and maintenance incentives
- Old buildings are better quality than new

General Comments

- All storytellers of our shared and different histories should be preserved. By adding context to those stories, add a richer perspective to our evolution.
- Should be different incentives: 1. help homeowners maintain houses, 2. incentivize developer to preserve
- Subcommittee meetings should be open to the public
- Format of tonight is for show and doesn't give the public better access to the meetings
- How can the city help residents and groups actually get money to maintain sites? Designation not enough.
- Seems like the Task Force is political cover for Jeweler's Row fiasco
- City shouldn't pay developer with tax benefits
- Cities have been very successful in preserving areas having requirement works for new development
- Should ask: what do you think is holding preservation back? Would we pay higher taxes for it?
- Should ask: solutions oriented, doesn't correspond to the outline the task force is going through
- Preservation is the reuse of buildings
- If it's going to go back to the Mayor, need ideas; the public has ideas, need to ask for them
- Save our neighborhoods.
- Consider future needs - size
- Out-of-town developers do not understand history
- Preservation is not always feasible

- Communities prefer adaptive reuse
- Different strategies for different areas
- Teach millennials about history of buildings and how to be good citizens; do this through apps and free tours like Cleveland Historical
- More trips/visuals rather than reading about it in school
- Keeping places/buildings/plazas so a new generation can experience a place first-hand (living history)

Question suggested by participant at Table 1:

"What would incentivize you to do more preservation?"

- Tax abatement
- Transfer of development rights
- Financial resources
- More energy
- Education and outreach
- Trained skilled craftsmen
- Liberalization of uses (sensible framework for land uses, zoning)
- Trained architects sensitive to historic resources
- Disincentivizing non-preservation
- Access to clearinghouse of trained architects
- Non-punitive regulations, i.e. window replacement
- Reserve incentives to improve property through taxes
- Centralized city resource to get answers
- Neighborhood liaisons

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This is just a summary of comments received. If you would like a complete listing of all comments, please email your request to preservation@phila.gov.