



Philadelphia

DESTINATION: DOWNTOWN UPPER DARBY

Upper Darby Township, Pennsylvania



Technical Assistance Panel | April 10–11, 2025

About

Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute. It is supported by more than 45,000 members in 82 countries representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land to create and sustain thriving communities worldwide. ULI Philadelphia has more than 900 members in the Philadelphia District Council, which includes the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Central Pennsylvania, Delaware, the Lehigh Valley, and Southern New Jersey. ULI provides guidance to nonprofits and municipalities seeking solutions to land use challenges. Its Technical Assistance Panels objectively evaluate specific needs and make recommendations on implementation in an atmosphere free of politics and preconceptions. ULI member and non-member professionals provide their expertise in a voluntary capacity and each has signed an agreement to prevent current and potential conflicts of interest.

ULI Advisory Services

Since 1947, the ULI Advisory Services program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for complex land use challenges. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services. National and international panelists are specifically recruited to form a panel of independent and objective volunteer ULI member experts with the skills needed to address the identified land use challenge. The program is designed to help break through obstacles, jump-start conversations, and solve tough challenges that need an outside, independent perspective. Three- and five-day engagements are offered to ensure thorough consideration of relevant topics. An additional national offering is the project analysis session (PAS) offered at ULI's Fall and Spring Meetings, through which specific land use challenges are evaluated by a panel of volunteer experts selected from ULI's membership. This is a conversational format that lends itself to an open exchange of ideas among diverse

industry practitioners with distinct points of view. From the streamlined two-hour session to the "deeper dive" eight-hour session, this intimate conversational format encourages creative thinking and problem solving. Learn more at americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/. Distinct from Advisory Services panels, TAPs leverage local expertise through a half-day to two-day process.

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Cover photo: Upper Darby municipal parking lot at the intersection of Garrett Rd., Fairfield Ave., and Long Ln. (ULI)

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Contents

Introduction, History, and Scope	1
The World In One Place	5
Clean and Safe	8
Green and Connected	11
Public Spaces and Celebrations	13
Business Empowerment	16
Revitalize Anchor Sites and Mixed-Use Development	18
Funding and Incentives	21
Visibility	23
Summary	25
Appendix: Stakeholder Participants	27
About the Panel	29

Acknowledgments

On behalf of ULI Philadelphia, the panel would like to thank the sponsor organization, Upper Darby Township for this opportunity to help envision its future and we look forward to seeing how this work will inform the plans for the bright future ahead for Downtown Upper Darby.

In particular, the panel would like to thank Upper Darby's Director of Community and Economic Development Rita LaRue, Planning and Zoning Manager Joshua Chast, and Program Manager Scott Alberts, for working closely with ULI Philadelphia staff in preparing for and hosting the panel.

The panel would also like to thank the mayor, municipal representatives, school district, county and state officials, engineers, architects, planners, transportation representatives, local nonprofits, arts and culture organizations, local business owners, developers, landlords and property owners, residents and other stakeholders for sharing their insights and perspectives during the interview sessions.

Introduction

Introduction

Upper Darby Township engaged with ULI Philadelphia to hold a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) called Destination: Downtown Upper Darby. As it engages in strategic planning for the Township, local government sought input from experienced urban planning practitioners on an actionable and transformative vision for its primary business district.

The TAP was held April 10-11, 2025. On Thursday, April 10, 2025, the panel, made up of eleven ULI members representing a broad spectrum of industries, convened in the Upper Darby Township municipal building to learn more about the project. In the morning,

the group toured Downtown Upper Darby, including Market Street/West Chester Pike, Terminal Square, 69th Street, Garrett Road and Walnut Street. In the afternoon, the panel broke into small group stakeholder discussions with representatives from the municipality; school district; county and state elected officials; transportation entities; arts and culture organizations and local nonprofits as well as planners, architects and engineers; local business owners; developers; landlords and property owners; and residents.

The next day, Friday, April 11, 2025, the panel reassembled to compile the gathered feedback and establish shared themes for their recommendations. They spent the rest

of the day in smaller groups developing a presentation which was presented to stakeholders outlining strategies and tactics the township could consider to frame and inform planning efforts.

History and Background

Located in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, Upper Darby is the sixth largest municipality in the Commonwealth with a population of more than 87,000 residents. Inhabited by Lenape people until European colonists arrived in the 17th century, the land was ceded to William Penn as part of the original colony of Pennsylvania. Situated between creeks and streams, the tract was largely agrarian until the 19th century. With the



View of the pedestrian bridge with 2 S. 69th Street in the background.



H Mart located at 7050 Terminal Square is a popular Asian grocery store chain.

introduction of textile mills, rock quarries, and factories, the area attracted a steady flow of residents, and its population exploded more than tenfold by the beginning of the 20th century.

The 69th Street Terminal opened in 1907 with train and trolley access to nearby towns and cities including Philadelphia, Chester, Media, and West Chester. The terminal's heavy traffic

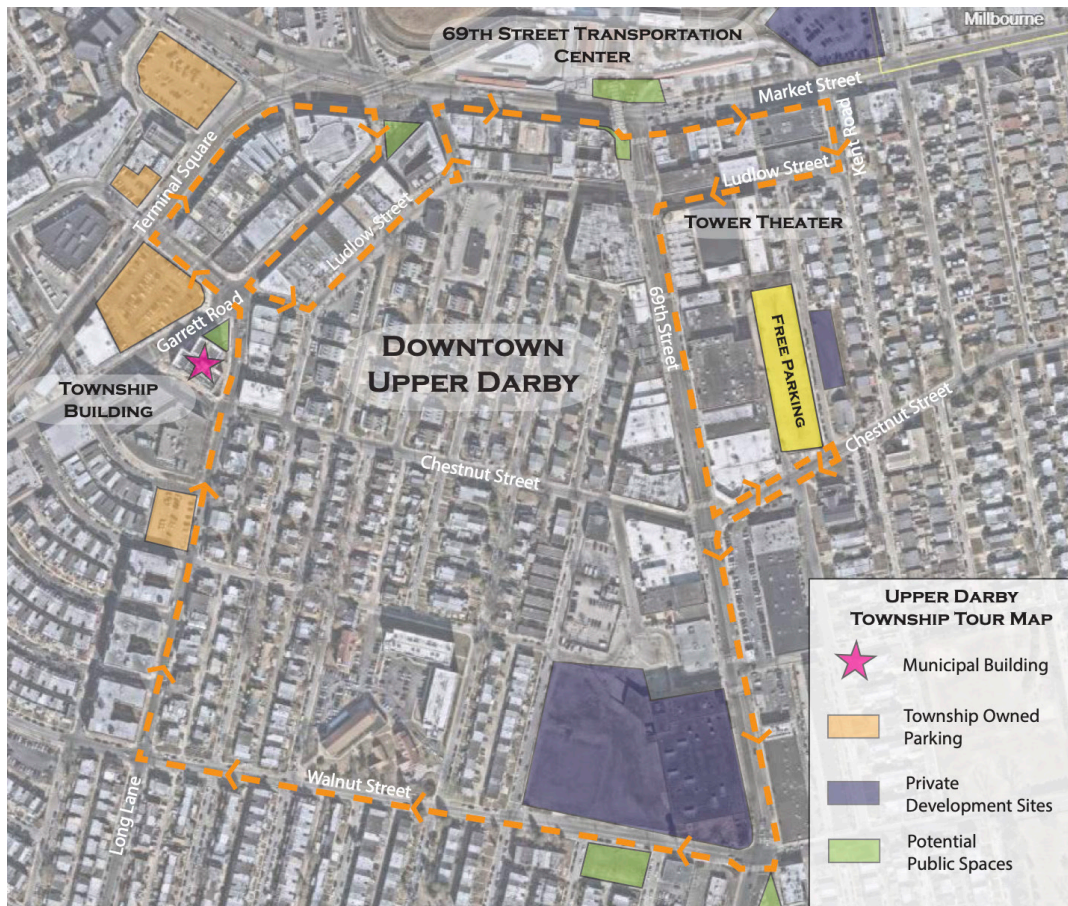
gave rise to a commercial district on 69th Street and a mixed-use walkable town center. Many of Downtown Upper Darby's structures were built in the 1920s with an ornate Art Deco style, including the Tower Theater, an iconic 3,000 seat movie theater turned performing arts venue and the Egyptian Revival-style McClatchy Building, named for the downtown's visionary developer, John H. McClatchy. For several decades,

Downtown Upper Darby, anchored by popular department stores, was one of the busiest on the East Coast.

In the late 1950s, an expansive Gimbels department store opened at 69th Street and Walnut Street, then was replaced by a Sears department store in the 1980s. The Sears location closed in 2012, and its 5-acre site has remained vacant. During that same period, from the 1960s through the early 2000s, the commercial district saw a decline with its department stores closing, more vacant storefronts, and fewer shoppers on foot.

At the same time, Upper Darby attracted a new and incredibly diverse international population that now includes over 100 languages and dialects. 23.5 percent of residents are foreign born and nearly 26 percent of households speak a first language other than English. Upper Darby's motto, "The World in One Place" aptly captures the vast global diversity of its residents.

Township officials have been working to revive Downtown Upper Darby, including a 2018 Downtown Upper Darby Vision plan, prepared by the Delaware County Planning Department and a 2018 Upper Darby Township Comprehensive Plan, both with limited impact. The Friends of the Tower Theater District, a special services nonprofit organization was established in 2021 with the goal of partnering with the owner of the Tower Theater, Live Nation, or acquiring the building outright.



Map of the walking tour held on the first day of the TAP.

Efforts are now underway in Upper Darby to create new paths for an implementable vision that focuses on:

- Development strategies for significant economic growth with opportunities for the entire community
- The transformation of underutilized sites into strategic community assets
- Safer, more walkable, and vibrant streets
- New, or newly renovated, public spaces that are equitable, dynamic, beautiful, and well programmed to attract residents and visitors
- Transit and mobility that is safe, convenient, accessible, and attractive, including parking that doesn't blight

the public realm or prohibit strategic development

- Economic resiliency through a competitive mix of large and small businesses

Scope

The Technical Assistance Panel was asked specifically to consider the following questions and offer recommendations:

- What's the best way to attract visitors to Downtown Upper Darby? What keeps people away from Upper Darby's downtown?
- How do we create more open space and green space that provides opportunities for both quiet respite and high-quality, actively programmed urban open space?

- What are the options to create density through zoning amendments or other policy initiatives?
- What are the steps we can take to achieve these goals?
- How can we fund the implementation of the panel's recommendations?

Through conversations with township professional staff and elected officials, a series of stakeholder sessions, and an initial presentation of findings, the panel considered the questions through the lens of people, place, and prosperity, and developed recommendations that seek to support the township in realizing its vision for a revitalized Downtown Upper Darby, built on a foundation of observed strengths, challenges and opportunities.



View of Walnut Street with the vacant lot of the former Upper Darby Multi-purpose Center on the left and on the right the vacant lot where the former Sear's building parking garage was. Both sites were presented to the panel as options for creating open space or potential development sites.



The World In One Place

Location, Location, Location

Upper Darby has long thrived because of its central location—close to Center City Philadelphia and connected via the 69th Street Transportation Center (the second busiest SEPTA transfer point after its 15th Street/City Hall station in Philadelphia) to train, bus, and trolley lines that extend to Center City as well as Media, West Chester, and Norristown.

Situated in Delaware County, close to Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties, and located at the nexus of key transit lines, Upper Darby has the potential to be revitalized as a destination that attracts residents, businesses, investors, shoppers, diners, and visitors from the entire region—just as it once did in the 20th century.

Diversity of Languages, Cultures and Businesses

Home to a richly multicultural populace, Upper Darby attracts immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. A growing Muslim population spurred the building of the Masjid Al Madinah Islamic Center which has become a community hub in the district. Central and South American, West African, Vietnamese, Caribbean, Indian, and Korean restaurants and shops populate the downtown district, and the Terminal Square area is anchored by a branch of the globally popular pan-Asian supermarket H-Mart. The highly anticipated International Festival, presented every year

by the township, celebrates this tapestry of influences, drawing crowds to Downtown Upper Darby. Stakeholders reported that Upper Darby is regarded as a welcoming landing place for New Americans as they acclimate to life in America.

Energized Administration

In 2024, Upper Darby swore in Mayor Ed Brown, a longtime resident who has worked with his administration to modernize zoning and regulatory practices, engage in planning, and attract investment to the township. With new energy and a newfound commitment to transparency and developing formalized processes, the township is well poised to create and implement strategic revitalization plans.



The township's motto that celebrates its diversity.



Downtown Upper Darby has a diverse population that is reflected in its small businesses.

Recommendations

- Convene community groups and institutions to spur dialogue and action around new development and the improvement of public spaces.
- Acknowledge discrete consumer/cultural submarkets and capitalize on that diversity.
- Pursue inclusive strategies for nightlife growth that reflect cultural diversity, such as alcohol-free alternatives for the Muslim community and for the youth population.
- While home to many small businesses, national brand destination retail and high-

tech sports entertainment venues with lively social atmospheres may help attract more visitors to the area.

- Through strategic messaging and promotion, reposition Downtown Upper Darby as a hub of a three-county trade area – commercial center serving Philadelphia, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties.
- Seek opportunities for community organizations to receive grant funding for programming/events that would help animate the district with foot traffic and activity.

Case Study

The Philadelphia Activities Fund

The Philadelphia Activities Fund provides small grants to nonprofit organizations that promote sportsmanship, arts, health, and cultural activities across the city. With awards averaging \$500–\$1,000, the fund has enabled grassroots programs to purchase essential supplies, cover event costs, and expand recreational opportunities for diverse communities. These investments have strengthened neighborhood cohesion by supporting youth sports leagues, dance classes, and wellness programs that foster safe, inclusive spaces. Beyond recreation, the fund indirectly benefits commercial corridors by attracting foot traffic and creating vibrant community hubs, which encourage local spending and economic vitality. By prioritizing accessibility and diversity, the Activities Fund has become a catalyst for neighborhood enrichment and a model for leveraging modest resources to achieve broad social impact.



92-98 S 69th St. at the intersection of Chestnut Street.



View of Market Street at 69th Street. One of strengths of Downtown is its unique architectural character.

Clean and Safe

Despite its status as a major commuter hub with proximity to the 69th Street Transportation Center, foot traffic seems to be mostly limited to commuter hours, and residents and business owners noted that after dark the streets are quiet, stoking public safety concerns.

Other than the iconic 69th Street bridge, there are few visual cues or reminders to locate pedestrians and showcase the business district, theater district, or other areas in the downtown.

Panel members also observed a lack of crosswalks coupled with a high volume of



Planters that could be reused with improved maintenance as seen along Terminal Square.

vehicle traffic created potentially hazardous conditions for those on foot.

Like many urban areas, Downtown Upper Darby shows evidence of income inequality and homelessness. For some visitors, the sight of unhoused people on the street will be a deterrent, and stakeholders reported that a perceived lack of safety may contribute to the reduced number of shoppers and diners who take advantage of Downtown Upper Darby's offerings.

Overflowing trash cans, debris littered on the sidewalks, abandoned cars, unmaintained sidewalks, and unused planters convey a lack of attention to the area.

Recommendations

- Continue to closely coordinate with Delaware County for safety concerns related to unhoused populations and to support residents in need.
- Increase the visibility of safety ambassadors and/or police officers on the streets to build confidence and trust to encourage more foot traffic, especially at night.
- Conduct and maintain an inventory of streetscape elements and conditions, including trash cans, furniture, lighting, street trees, and planters.
- Prioritize fixing, replacing, or removing existing elements currently in poor condition.

Case Study

NYC Vacant Storefront Toolkit

The NYC Vacant Storefront Toolkit was developed to help landlords and municipalities address the growing challenge of empty ground-floor spaces. By providing a set of practical “recipes” for activation—such as art-filled window displays, pop-up retail, and business plan competitions—the toolkit transformed vacant properties into vibrant, low-risk opportunities for engagement. These strategies improved the streetscape, attracted foot traffic, and signaled investment in the district, which in turn increased inquiries and accelerated lease signings. Landlords benefited from enhanced property visibility and reduced carrying costs, while municipalities strengthened economic vitality and community pride. The result was a win-win: proactive activation not only filled spaces but also elevated the public realm, creating safer, more inviting downtown environments.

- Ensure trash collection is timely, consistent, and in conjunction with sidewalk sweeping services following collection.
- Pressure wash sidewalks. At least one per year to start, increasing frequency as capacity increases.
- Invest in a pedestrian scale lighting system. A thoughtful, well-maintained lighting system will enhance safety, increase walkability, improve sense of place, and accrue economic and social benefits by benefiting local businesses and increasing community engagement.
- Institute a pedestrian wayfinding system to provide visual cues and guide people to

- key landmarks, shopping, dining, and other district destinations.
- Improve pedestrian crossing at key intersections, such as 69th Street & Market Street, Terminal Square, and Bywood Avenue.
- Clean and maintain the public realm along storefronts and develop programs for façade improvements.
- Work with property and business owners to activate storefront windows with art or pop-up shops in vacant spaces.
- Address blighted, damaged, deteriorated or other unsafe conditions of vacant retail properties.



53 S 69th St. One of the recently shuttered prominent storefronts.



Large vacant lot of former parking garage to empty Sears building on the left. The largest vacant property in the downtown area.



Vacant storefronts could be activated for temporary art galleries and/or studios.



View of the intersection of Terminal Square and Market Street. The combination of heavy vehicle traffic, bus and trolleys, leads to safety concerns for pedestrian and cyclists.



Green and Connected

There is opportunity to improve and promote connections via public transportation, cycling, and walking between Downtown Upper Darby and the rest of Upper Darby Township, including hotels, the Performing Arts Center and recreation destinations. Downtown Upper Darby has the potential to be positioned as a premier destination for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts by highlighting Downtown Upper Darby's proximity to waterways and regional trail networks.

- Explore partnerships with a conservancy to improve green infrastructure, such as Natural Lands, a nonprofit which has successfully preserved open space throughout the region, including in urban environments.
- Explore opportunities to restore or build new connections between Downtown

Upper Darby to nearby natural resources, including Cobbs Creek Park and trail, Naylor's Run, the Cobbs Creek golf course; promote these connections as part of larger campaign highlighting Downtown Upper Darby's assets and locational benefits.

- Partner with workforce development organizations to cultivate opportunities for young workers and community members to gain new skillsets and professional experience. These programs can provide helpful skills-based employment training in areas that will help enhance the Downtown Upper Darby experience such as landscaping and public space maintenance.

Case Study

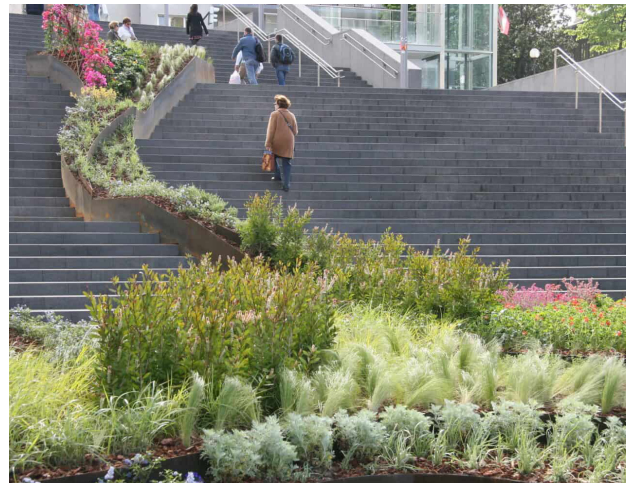
Downtown Pittsburgh Green Partnership

Since the 1970s, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) has partnered with downtown Pittsburgh stakeholders, including the city government and local businesses, to enhance green infrastructure and public spaces. WPC manages seasonal plantings, tree installations, and innovative features such as rain gardens and bioswales to address stormwater challenges. The partnership operates through a mix of philanthropic support, corporate sponsorships, and volunteer engagement, ensuring sustainable funding and community involvement. Outcomes include the planting of over 750 trees, installation of 1,200 hanging baskets, and creation of a large green wall in the Cultural District. These efforts have improved air quality, reduced urban heat, and made downtown Pittsburgh more attractive for residents, workers, and visitors. The initiative demonstrates how long-term collaboration between a conservancy and a downtown district can deliver environmental benefits while supporting economic vitality and placemaking.

The panel presented inspirations for adding more trees and seating to underutilized plaza spaces (top) or unique ways to incorporate greenery into the steps in front of the Upper Darby municipal building (pg. 2), middle and bottom photos.



Congress Ave. Pocket Patios AUSTIN, TEXAS designed by dwg. in collaboration with the city, local business owners, and the local business alliance.



"The Garden That Climbs the Stairs" designed by Balmori Associates for client Bilbao Jardin.



Public Spaces and Celebrations

Downtown Upper Darby has existing but underutilized public gathering areas and lacks recreation spaces that serve people of all ages and demographics. The district would also benefit from more street trees and other greenery.

Drawing from its diverse population and historic connection to the performing arts through the Tower Theater and Upper Darby Summer Stage, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, Upper Darby has a strong track record of mounting public events such as the International Festival and can build on these successes to the benefit of local businesses.

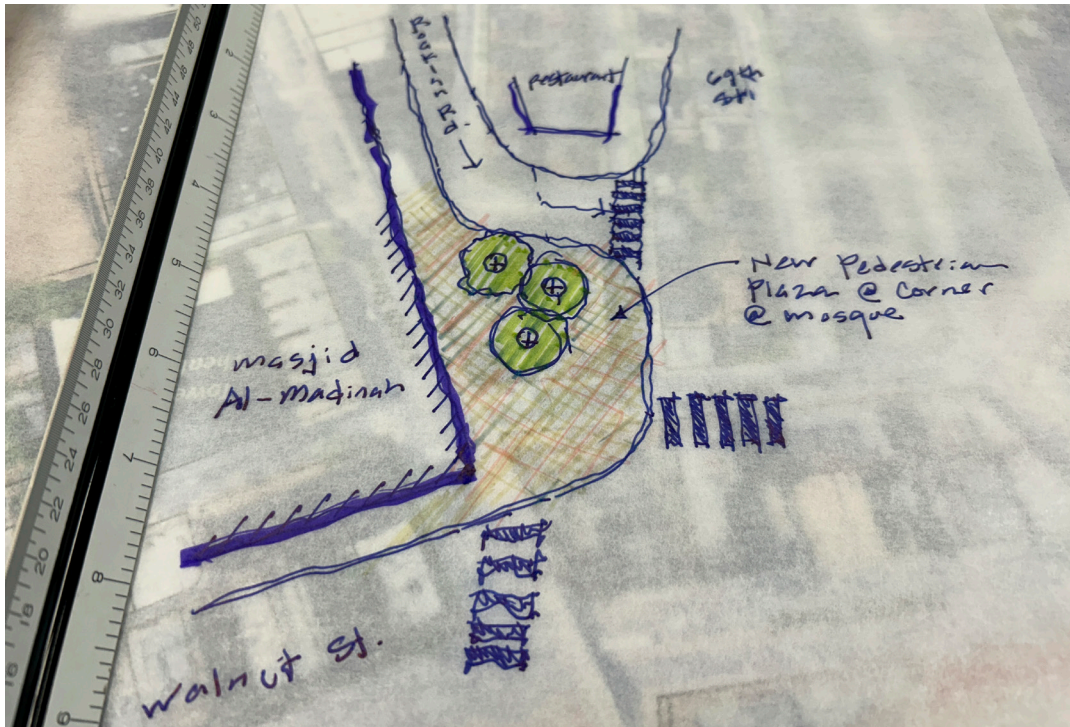
Recommendations

- Develop events such as a farmers' market, an International Bazaar, or night markets with food trucks to draw visitors and highlight local cuisines.
- Build on the success of the International Festival with year-round pop-up events that will support micro entrepreneurship.
- Redirect Rocklyn Road onto 69th Street to open a pedestrian area in front of the Mosque.
- In the short term, paint the 69th Street Pedestrian Bridge and improve lighting.

Case Study

Warner Robins, Georgia – “Wings at the Commercial Circle” Public Art Installation

The Warner Robins Downtown Development Authority (DDA) partnered with local high schools and a technical college to create a permanent art installation celebrating the city's aviation heritage. Students collaborated with professional welders to design and fabricate 46 metal airplanes, which were installed in a prominent downtown location. This partnership provided students with hands-on experience in design, engineering, and teamwork, while fostering civic pride and creative expression. The project enhanced the visual appeal of the district, attracting visitors and encouraging foot traffic to nearby businesses. By integrating youth engagement into downtown revitalization, the initiative strengthened community identity and contributed to broader economic development goals, positioning Warner Robins as a vibrant destination for residents and tourists alike.



Panel members proposed creating a new plaza space in front of the Masjid Al-Madinah to create another pedestrian node at this intersection.

Long term, consider the pros and cons of keeping, removing, or replacing the structure.

- Advertise Upper Darby to participants of large-scale events, such as the America250 celebrations and FIFA World Cup 2026 fans— to welcome national and international visitors to its diverse mix of businesses, restaurants, and overnight accommodations.
- Strengthen relationships with local public and private schools to identify areas

of mutual benefit and opportunities for collaboration. Creative partnerships can lead to hands-on learning opportunities for students, increased community pride, and positive economic impact for local businesses.

- Structurally reinforce the steps at the Municipal Plaza at Five Points for seating and use during events. Add shade trees and activate the plaza with planters and public art.

View of intersection of S. 69th Street and Walnut Street.



Tower Theater on S. 69th Street that has been shuttered for years.



Panel members walk through the plaza space in front of the municipal building along Garrett Road.



Business Empowerment

While the diversity of local businesses and their owners is one of Downtown Upper Darby's greatest strengths, it has been challenging bringing together business owners. To date there is no business association or community development corporation that is dedicated to the coordination and shaping of the future of Downtown Upper Darby.

Although the panel heard that the new administration had done much to professionalize and update procedures, such as the building inspection processes, some entrepreneurs felt that the additional oversight was burdensome and that more communication was needed.

- Convene a small business committee to network and foster collaboration within the community and provide input to the township administration.
- Integrate the local business community with special events to ensure business owners can leverage increase in foot traffic by offering extended hours and specials.
- Increase education and outreach on the changes in township policies and ensure that developers and property owners are prepared to comply. Offer resources and any applications or communications in multiple languages.
- Support business and property owners in the creation of a business association or business improvement district to ensure their interests are represented in plans.

- Explore the creation of a special services district that will focus on public space priorities such as safety, facades, sidewalks, landscaping, and street furniture, attract new financial resources through philanthropic support, and promote Downtown Upper Darby as a destination and a business-friendly place to be. This organization would also drive programming initiatives such as:

- Coordinating street festivals and pop-up events
- Organizing food truck festivals and night markets
- Developing a program for temporary activation of vacant storefronts
- Creating district-specific marketing and promotion plans
- Working with strategic property owners to encourage the short-term activation of their ground floors while long-term permanent uses are secured

Starting a Business Improvement District (BID) in Philadelphia

The City of Philadelphia's "Starting a Business Improvement District (BID) in Philadelphia" report can be a helpful tool for any community considering the establishment of a BID. While the precise steps may be different in communities outside of Philadelphia, the broader process can be a helpful guide to determine if a BID is a feasible option to support the revitalization of specific commercial areas. While one option, there are additional organization models that can support similar goals if it is determined a BID is not feasible (i.e. a business association, community development corporation, or a position within municipal government specifically designated to support downtown initiatives). [Report found here.](#)

Panel members tour the row of businesses along Terminal Square.



Revitalize Anchor Sites and Mixed-Use Development

The Ashkenazy Acquisition Corporation owns several properties on 69th Street from Market to Walnut Streets which creates opportunities for bold visioning and redevelopment. Primary holdings include 150 S. 69th Street, a nearly six-acre parcel that once housed a major department store and parking garage and is now vacant, and the 69th Street Shoppers Parking Garage on Heather Road as well as multiple retail locations.

Representatives from the company participated in the stakeholder interviews and the panel recognized this as a positive step in strengthening the relationship with the township. With continued communication from both sides, there is opportunity for targeted incentives to drive transformational reuse.

Recommendations

- In coordination with the development of the 2028 Upper Darby Comprehensive Plan, explore what mix of zoning relief and incentives may accelerate the redevelopment of key mixed-use (commercial and residential) sites throughout the downtown district, including:
 - 150 S. 69th Street (formerly a Sears department store)
 - SEPTA 69th Street Transportation Center Parking Lot
 - Municipal Parking Lot #1 (Garrett Road and Chestnut Street)
 - Municipal Parking Lot #2 (West Chester Pike and Bywood Avenue)

- Fairfield Lot (Bywood & Fairfield Avenue)
- 7200 Chestnut Street
- 201 Bywood Avenue (currently a United States Post Office)
- 67 Long Lane Retail and Office Building
- Commission a market feasibility study in alignment with property owners to determine desirable uses and envision a bold future that leads to the development of a Downtown Upper Darby master plan.
- Prioritize community engagement so that new concepts can become part of the existing social fabric.
- While repositioning potential sites for long-term use, partner with property owners to activate and test various concepts, such as:
 - Pop-up artist studios and galleries
 - Local craft and artisan vendors
 - International bazaar
 - Food hall or market
 - Youth programs

Explore what zoning relief or incentives may support the acceleration of redevelopment, such as density bonuses, parking requirement reductions, overlay zones to bypass restrictive zoning, adaptive reuse ordinances, and expedited permitting. Examples include:

- **Austin, TX – Highland Mall Redevelopment:** The city created a

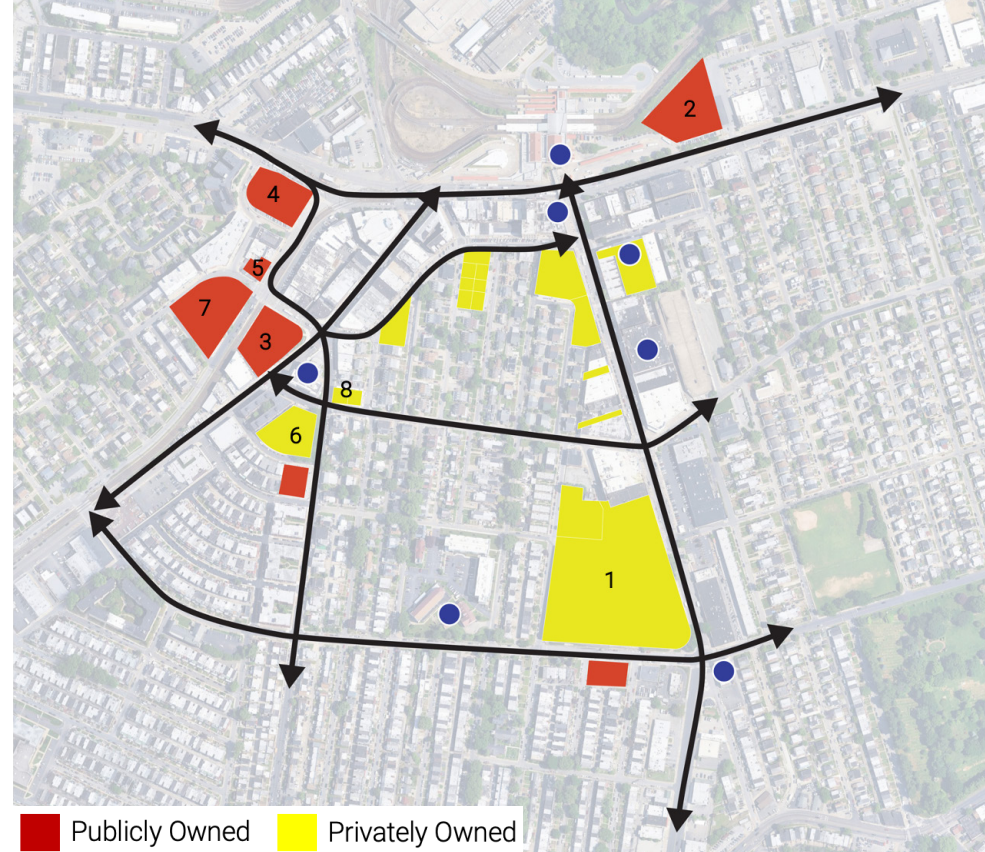
Tower Theater

The Tower Theater, built in 1929 and now owned by Live Nation, was once a landmark in the district. Since its closure in 2022, Downtown Upper Darby's streets are quieter at night and nearby restaurants close their doors relatively early.

- Strongly prioritize opportunities with the current owner, Live Nation, to reopen the Tower Theater as a live music and entertainment venue. Through direct negotiations, explore points of leverage to incentivize the owner to reopen the theater, such as tax abatements.
- Work with Live Nation to activate the lobby or street level area of the theater by offering creative food and beverage pop-up opportunities.
- Campaign for the reconstruction of the iconic tower on top of the Tower Theater to restore a unique and strong sense of place.
- Explore temporary activations of the Tower Theater space with alternative event uses such as community theater performances, graduation ceremonies, weekly "smaller house" performances, or memorable event activations such as a New Years Eve celebration.
- Conduct a market analysis to understand other viable commercial should the owner sell the site or determine an entertainment use is not feasible.

Commercial-to-Mixed-Use Overlay District, which streamlined approvals and allowed higher residential density and mixed-use programming. These fast-tracked permits for projects that allocated at least 20% of units as affordable housing, enabling the mall's conversion into a mixed-use campus with housing, offices, and educational facilities.

- Plymouth Meeting, PA – Conditional Uses & Variances:** The township adopted a zoning amendment enabling apartments for conditional use on former retail parcels. This incremental approach allowed phased redevelopment into a town center with residential, sports facilities, and community amenities.



Underutilized Sites

- 150 S. 69th Street (formerly a Sears department store)
- SEPTA 69th Street Transportation Center Parking Lot
- Municipal Parking Lot #1 (Garrett Road and Chestnut Street)
- Municipal Parking Lot #2 (West Chester Pike and Bywood Avenue)
- Fairfield Lot (Bywood & Fairfield Avenue)
- 7200 Chestnut Street
- 201 Bywood Avenue (currently a United States Post Office)
- 67 Long Lane Retail and Office Building



The Upper Darby Township Municipal Building.



69th Street Transportation Center pedestrian bridge over Market Street.



Funding and Incentives

Municipal financial resources have been limited for major redevelopment projects, making significant investments in the public realm challenging. Explore funding sources and create incentive programs to attract new development and investment.

- Implement a new Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA), a tax abatement program allowing local authorities to provide tax exemption in a particular geographic area that incentivizes development.
- Review state and county resources for catalytic investments, such as:
 - Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ): Broad state and local tax abatements for up to 10 years.
 - Historic Preservation Tax Credit: 25% credit for qualified rehabilitation of historic buildings.
 - Job Creation Tax Credit (JCTC): Up to \$1,000 per new job created.
 - Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP): Competitive grants for large-scale projects with regional impact.
 - Business in Our Sites (BOS): Grants and loans for site preparation and infrastructure.
 - PA SITES Program: Planning and construction grants for strategic sites.

- Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA): Low-interest loans for land/building acquisition and construction.
- Building PA Program: Mezzanine capital for real estate projects in small and mid-sized communities.
- PHFA Multifamily Loan Programs: Financing for mixed-use and affordable housing projects.
- Main Street Matters Program: Funding to support revitalization efforts in planning, business support, aesthetic improvements, and the increase of safety and security.
- Explore appropriate areas for re-zoning and transit-oriented communities, prioritizing sites identified by the panel for revitalization and mixed-use development.
- Investigate the feasibility of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) in Upper Darby as a means of stimulating development.
- Expand the township's vacant properties program to include an annual fee for owners whose commercial properties are vacant.

Case Study

Arlington, MA – Vacant Commercial Property Registry Program

Arlington, MA adopted a bylaw requiring owners of vacant commercial or industrial properties to register annually and maintain their buildings to prevent blight. Under this bylaw, a property is considered vacant after 90 consecutive days of non-use, and the annual registration fee is \$400 per storefront. Owners can request waivers for financial hardship or by agreeing to display public art in the windows, which helps maintain visual appeal. Non-compliance can result in fines of \$100 per day, and unpaid fees may become a municipal lien. Since implementation, the program has improved streetscapes, encouraged public art partnerships, and increased accountability among property owners, reducing neglected storefronts and enhancing community engagement.

Visibility

As Downtown Upper Darby continues to evolve, increasing visibility of ongoing improvements and community assets is essential to building awareness and momentum.

- Develop awareness campaigns to proactively educate residents, business owners, and developers on the positive enhancements currently underway in Downtown Upper Darby and design a platform for communicating future accomplishments.
- Promote transparency on improvement and development projects so that all stakeholders can stay up to date and witness transformation.
- Articulate how projects benefit not just immediate stakeholders but the broader community. This will help build trust in the capacity and capability of the township and its partners to deliver meaningful changes.
- Work with Visit Delco to promote niche markets and market the township's offerings to those markets.
- Lean into Downtown Upper Darby as a foodie destination, with regular marketing of its many offerings, such as special dining weeks and other restaurant promotions.
- Celebrate diversity as a value through well posted visual cues.
- Seek ways to create visual consistency and character. This can be accomplished

Case Study

Walk Raleigh Guerrilla Wayfinding

With its unique architectural legacy, from Art Deco facades to the 69th Street Pedestrian Bridge, Downtown Upper Darby is saturated with aesthetic character. However, there are few other visual cues or reminders that showcase Downtown Upper Darby to the area and help orient residents and visitors.

In 2012, Raleigh, NC launched an innovative pedestrian wayfinding project called Walk Raleigh, originally conceived as a guerrilla effort by urban planner Matt Tomasulo. The initiative addressed the common misconception of long walking distances downtown by installing simple signs at major intersections showing walking times to nearby destinations, along with

QR codes for more information. The project cost was minimal—just a week of planning and an hour of installation for 27 signs—yet it sparked significant community engagement and media attention. Although the signs were initially removed, public support led the city to adopt Walk Raleigh as an official pilot program, reinforcing Raleigh's identity as a walkable city. This grassroots approach encouraged healthier lifestyles, reduced car dependency, and fostered a sense of community pride through accessible, human-scaled design. The success of Walk Raleigh demonstrates how low-cost, creative interventions can transform perceptions and promote pedestrian activity.


through low-cost interventions like consistent paint colors on pedestrian lighting and installing creatively branded crosswalks.

- Deploy consistent streetscape amenities throughout the downtown district including: benches, trash cans, sidewalk planters as well as the installation of flags, banners, or wayfinding signage.



Panel members reflect on their observations from the walking tour and stakeholder interviews.

Summary



Downtown Upper Darby stands on the cusp of transformation, with great promise for all stakeholders. This report offers suggestions for the planning process, from partnerships and consensus building to improving the streetscape to placemaking in vital gateway areas. In conclusion, the panel would like to emphasize the following points:

Make Public Investment Visible

Showcasing the township's commitment to a revitalized future begins with simple visual cues—cleaning up trash, repairing sidewalks, refreshing lighting and plantings, and installing streetscape furniture. Adding placemaking banners and flags will enhance curb appeal and signal momentum.

Prioritize the Gateways into Downtown Upper Darby

In addition to making quick improvements on the street to communicate that it's a new day in Downtown Upper Darby, it is equally important to freshen up existing gateways like the 69th Street Pedestrian Bridge and install new landmarks where there are none.

Build Trust and Belonging

Make residents and visitors feel welcome by increasing the visibility of safety officers and public-facing staff. Clearly message what the township is doing, how it works for residents, and how it's positively impacting all of Upper Darby.

Celebrate “The World In One Place”

Embrace Upper Darby's greatest strength by supporting community connections wherever possible. Forge new partnerships with business and property owners, community groups, schools, recreation, and nonprofits to coordinate on programming, such as the arts, technology, sports, and events of all kinds.

The panel thanks Upper Darby Township for this opportunity to help envision its future and we look forward to seeing how this work will inform the plans for the bright future ahead for Downtown Upper Darby.

Appendix

Stakeholder Participants

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Delaware County Chamber of Commerce

Delaware County Economic Development Corporation

Delaware County Planning Department

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Delaware County Transportation Management Association

Friends of Upper Darby Trails

Girls Auto Clinic

Masjid Omar Mosque

Mochi Donuts

Multicultural Community Family Services

New Hope Property LLC

Office of Senator Tim Kearney

Polites Florist

Rockwell Custom

SEPTA

Temple University

Tower Theater District

United States Congress

Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation

Upper Darby Corporation for Community and Economic Development

Upper Darby School District

Upper Darby Township

Upper Darby Township Environmental Advisory Committee

Upper Darby Township Planning Commission

Visit DELCO



Panel members meet with the TAP sponsor.



About the Panel

**CO-CHAIR
Patty Elkis**

**Former Deputy
Executive Director
Delaware Valley
Regional Planning
Commission**



Patty Elkis has over 35 years of planning experience, having spent the bulk of her career at the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), the regional planning agency for the Greater Philadelphia area. Serving as Deputy Executive Director, Patty helped run the organization, overseeing all the agency's work in transportation, capital programming and project implementation, smart growth, housing, economic development, demographic analyses, environmental, climate and energy, and healthy communities planning. Her work centered on promoting equity, partnerships, and implementation, with recent focus on leveraging opportunities in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for our region. While guiding the planning work of the agency, Patty also continued her passion for environmental planning by promoting open space preservation through Return on Environment studies and by leading The Water Table, a collective impact initiative to improve water quality.

**CO-CHAIR
Marshall W.
Snively**

**President
Lancaster City Alliance**

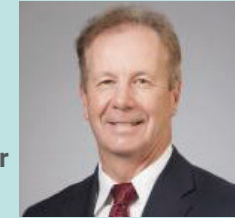


Marshall W. Snively is a proven senior level economic and community development leader with almost thirty years of experience devoted to the equitable growth and vibrancy of urban areas; including almost eighteen years of fostering the economic growth of the City of Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and previously, fifteen years in Baltimore, Maryland.

Marshall is President of the Lancaster City Alliance (LCA). Created July 1, 2013, LCA represents the consolidation of two non-profit organizations; the James Street Improvement District and the Lancaster Alliance, both dedicated to community and economic development for the City of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. With a focus of empowering neighborhoods and setting the stage for increased investment, LCA was charged with the development of Building On Strength, the City's 15-year economic development strategic plan. Implementation of that plan remains one of LCA's largest bodies of work. Under Marshall's leadership, LCA also manages Lancaster City's Downtown Investment District and City Revitalization & Improvement Zone (CRIZ).

**David C. Curran,
MAI, AI-GRS, CRE**

**Executive Director
Valuation & Advisory
Practice Group Member
| Office Valuation
Practice Group
Cushman & Wakefield**



Prior to joining Cushman & Wakefield of Pennsylvania, Inc., Valuation & Advisory in September, 2005, David Curran was a Vice President and lender for eight years, first with Mellon Bank and then with PNC Bank, both in Philadelphia. Clients included REITs, large private developers and institutional investment advisors. Prior to that, he was an appraiser with Mellon Bank and an independent appraisal company in the Philadelphia suburbs. Planning and development experience was gained with the Newark (NJ) Redevelopment & Housing Authority, and brokerage experience with Coldwell Banker commercial real estate in New York City.

Appraisal and consulting assignments have included vacant land, office buildings, shopping centers, industrial properties, residential complexes and a variety of special-purpose properties, primarily in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. As a lender, he provided construction and shorter-term financing for many of these property types as well, plus lines of credit and project -based financing for REITs and institutional advisors. Mr. Curran currently focuses primarily on larger office and life science assets in the Philadelphia region, including numerous CBD high-rises, larger suburban office properties and office parks, and life science/R&D facilities.

Charlene Drake

**Senior Principal
Geologist
Terraphase Engineering**



Charlene Drake is a Senior Principal Geologist with Terraphase Engineering. She has over 30 years of experience in environmental site characterization and remediation, focusing on brownfields redevelopment, due diligence, and community engagement. She supports the entire development process, collaborating with development teams, design professionals, and contractors to achieve project goals. Charlene holds a New York Professional Geologist license and is a New Jersey Licensed Site Remediation Professional (LSRP) and serves on the Board of Trustees of the NJ LSRP Association.

She currently co-chairs the ULI Philadelphia Industrial Council. As a strong client advocate and negotiator, Charlene achieves client goals using technical expertise, persuasive communication, and a deep understanding of environmental regulations.

John Haak, AICP

**Formerly Philadelphia
City Planning
Commission
City of Philadelphia**



John is a city and regional planner with 40 years of experience with municipal and regional agencies, community and business stakeholders, and professional organizations. While on the staff of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC), John developed expertise in strategic and comprehensive planning, economic and demographic analyses, capital and infrastructure programming, sustainability, community planning, land use, and transportation.

John led several cycles of PCPC's analyses of the City's more than 250 commercial districts, centers, and corridors. In the most recent of these cycles, commercial area recommendations were incorporated into each of the 18 district plans completed as part of the Philadelphia2035 initiative.

John also led the DVRPC-funded study to identify opportunities and challenges for infrastructure and community reinvestment around the North Philadelphia Station Area.

A graduate of Brown University and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, John has served on various committees of ULI-Philadelphia and APA-PA's Southeast Section. John has taught community redevelopment and revitalization as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Temple University.

Marla S. Hamilton

**Senior Vice President
Client Engagement and
Business Support
PIDC**



Marla Hamilton is an Economic Development Professional with over 25 years' experience in economic development planning and implementation.

Drawing upon Marla's vast expertise in assessing business needs, delivering practical solutions, and establishing herself as a trusted advisor to PIDC clients, PIDC tapped Marla to launch a new PIDC division, Client Engagement and Business Support. As Senior Vice President of this division, Marla focuses on diagnosing critical business needs, providing sound business advice, and building a library of tools to deliver practical and impactful business solutions. Through strategic and focused approaches to problem-solving, Marla has created the Business Builder Workshop series, the PIDC Executive Leadership Series, the Business Builder Workshop series En Español, and 1-on-1 business coaching and advisory initiatives.

Prior to joining PIDC, Marla served as Special Assistant to former Mayor John F. Street and Director of Affirmative Action and Minority Opportunities for the Philadelphia City Council under former City Council Presidents John F. Street and Anna C. Verna. Marla holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Pittsburgh and has earned several continuing education certificates.

Aminah McNulty, AICP

Research Associate
PORT



Aminah McNulty is a Research Associate at PORT, where she advances the firm's commitment to equitable, climate-resilient public spaces. Her work focuses on public space funding models, governance structures, and sustainable infrastructure strategies, contributing to PORT's Constructing the American Public Realm initiative and presenting findings at national conferences. With experience spanning statewide environmental advocacy, national resilience policy, and public-sector design consulting, she has worked on geospatial analysis, community engagement, and climate adaptation initiatives, helping municipalities implement sustainable infrastructure, trail planning, and land use strategies. Aminah holds dual Master's degrees in Landscape Architecture and City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania, with a Certificate in Ecological Planning.

Stacey Mosley

Senior Director,
Development &
Research
Brandywine Realty Trust



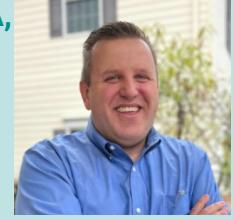
Stacey Mosley is the Senior Director of Development & Research at Brandywine Realty Trust, leading a variety of development projects in addition to data driven acquisition analyses, oversight of the organization's Neighborhood Engagement Initiatives, and development of strategies to take on emerging industry trends.

After studying Manufacturing & Design Engineering at Northwestern University, Stacey applied her interest in products and process at the City of Philadelphia working on both the Vacant Property Strategy and Open Data Initiative before starting her own proptech company, Stepwise, and pursuing investment and development projects.

Stacey is a board member of the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, the co-chair of the Community & Economic Development Council at the Philadelphia Chapter of the Urban Land Institute, a member of NAIOP's national Visionaries program, and a recurring speaker at Drexel University, Temple University, and the University of Pennsylvania for courses in Urban Planning and Spatial Analysis.

Kevin Selger, RLA, LLA, LEED AP

Vice President /
Philadelphia Office
Manager
Gilmore & Associates,
Inc.



Over the past 25 years of professional practice Kevin Selger's work has spanned geographies from the local region in Pennsylvania/New Jersey, nationally across the United States, and internationally. As part of a mid-sized consulting engineering firm Kevin leads and provides executive management of a multi-disciplinary office in Center City Philadelphia which provides Site/Civil Engineering, Land Development Consulting, Landscape Architecture, Water/Wastewater Engineering, Geotechnical Consulting, and Environmental Consulting Services to a variety of public and private clientele. Kevin also provides leadership to the firm's landscape architecture practice across multiple offices. His responsibilities include design and project leadership, quality control, operations and business management of the office, staff management, proposal development, contract management, maintaining client relationships, and marketing/business development.

Evan Todtz, AICP

Urban Designer /
Planner
Gensler



Evan is an urban designer and planner with experience across the

Americas on projects spanning community, neighborhood, and regional planning to streetscapes and public spaces, as well as higher education and campus planning.

Evan's approach to planning centers on engaging local voices in the design process to build collective knowledge through storytelling, mapping, art, and participatory design exercises. He strives to advance social and environmental justice in historically under-resourced communities. Beyond his interests in design justice and advocacy through neighborhood planning and public space design, he also enjoys following historic and contemporary movements in Latin American urbanism, architecture, and design.

Evan is a member of the 2025 ULI Philadelphia NEXT Flight and lives in Norris Square where he enjoys volunteering as a garden keeper with the Norris Square Neighborhood Project.

Benjamin Van Couvering

Director of
Development
The Micheals
Organization



Benjamin Van Couvering is a seasoned real estate development professional with extensive experience in affordable housing, urban policy, and project management. Most recently, Benjamin was Senior Development Officer at Housing Development Corporation MidAtlantic in Lancaster, PA, where he executed the organization's real estate development strategies, securing financing through LIHTC, HUD RAD, and public and private loans and grants.

His expertise spans feasibility underwriting, acquisitions, construction supervision, and leading project teams to execute complex projects. Previously, he held roles at Pennrose, NYC's Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and Morningstar Inc., honing his skills in finance, construction, and public policy.

Benjamin holds a Master of Science in Urban Policy Analysis and Management from The New School and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Oberlin College. He lives in Philadelphia and is an avid squash player.