



PDF Complete
Your complimentary use period has ended.
Thank you for using PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)



NEWS

[send to printer](#)

July 17-23, 2003

Also this issue:

CITYSPACE

[Love and Politics](#)
-Daniel Brook

Brick Louse



CASH IS CLAY: Bricks along the 200 block of Market Street lie in disrepair. Photo By: Mike Mergen

Once again, cars, not people, count.

by Alan Greenberger

Last week, we went to the National Constitution Center. The show in its Kimmel Theater was particularly moving and reminded us that in our system of governance, there is no higher authority than the citizens. The narrator ends a breathtaking visual sequence on the progress of American freedom with these three simple words: We The People.

So it came as a shock when I read how sorry PennDOT was about replacing our paved Broad Street crosswalks with asphalt. A PennDOT official was quoted in the *Inquirer* as suggesting that had they known it was Governor Rendell's project, perhaps they would have reconsidered their actions.

The act itself was thoughtless and outrageous. But I was more outraged by the implication that if not for the governor's role in the improvements, replacing paving stones with asphalt would have gone unchecked and, for the folks at PennDOT, would be business as usual. Excuse me, PennDOT, but while you may think you answer to the governor, in fact, you answer to the people. The people, acting through our elected officials, invested in those crosswalks. We took the time to design them, paid extra money to install them and expect you to maintain them. As a friend of mine in the National Park Service points out, you are in the maintenance business -- start maintaining. If you think a change is needed, make a proposal and let it be considered in public.

PennDOT, of course, is not the only agency out there committing institutional vandalism. Every day, one or more of the various utility companies in this city is ripping up something for needed infrastructure improvements. And every day, one of them is leaving behind a mess. If you want to see dozens of such acts, come down to Old City and see what has been done to brick and granite streets. On my block of Market Street alone, I can count more than half a dozen minor and major instances where brickwork in the street was removed and replaced with asphalt.

A moment of praise for those who have done the right thing: PECO tore up the Belgian blocks of the 100 block of Chestnut Street and, when they were done, put the pavers back. It's an historic street and they were obligated to do so. Nonetheless, well done.

Over on the unit and 100 blocks of North Third Street, Philadelphia Gas Works held merchants and residents hostage with months of construction chaos. Then, as they neared the end of a major gas-line improvement project, they indicated to the Old City District that they had no plans to repave the street, merely to repair those sections that they had torn up. Anyone familiar with the situation knows that they tore up nearly everything. It took community action and last minute intervention from city Managing Director Phil Goldsmith to get the street properly repaved. Thanks go to the managing director -- he gets an A-plus.



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

an F. PGW is a repeat offender. They are responsible for the majority of
se they routinely leave their plastic barriers behind to further litter the
ld me that all utilities are responsible for restoring the street
at relies on the Streets Department for repairs). However, the law only
not necessarily to the way it was. Hence, asphalt -- cheap and simple.

This callousness comes from a simple value set: Cars are more important than people. Or more precisely, people in cars are more important than people on foot. After all, the person in a car moving along even at 25 mph can't really see these small acts of vandalism. And if they can't really feel them through their vehicle's shock absorbers, then life is good, right? The pedestrian, on the other hand, sees everything.

Right now, and throughout much of our country, the suburban car mentality that feeds these values dominates the decision-making process. And in places where pedestrian activity is at a minimum, this may be good policy. But here in the city, especially one whose unique attributes are its history and its walkability, a better balance needs to be struck. If I could quantify it, I would say that the interests of pedestrians, especially in Center City and the various neighborhood commercial cores, needs to dominate by a proportion of 60 percent to the automobile's 40 percent.

One way to make sure that this happens is to restructure governmental authority as it relates to the character and maintenance of the public way. My colleague, Peta Raabe, a landscape architect, has suggested that there be a Department of Sidewalks to counterbalance the Department of Streets. I like this suggestion and its implications. One could even see it as consistent with another message of the National Constitution Center: Government of the people works best when power is divided among responsible parties.

Alan Greenberger is a principal of MGA Partners, Architects; chairperson of the Old City District and a member of the Design Advocacy Group.



-- Respond to this article in our Forums -- [click](#) to jump there