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DAG Would !



Hindsight is 20/20: Philadelphia's great potential will remain just that without solid planning.

little -- substituting ersatz ballpark ambience for the real thing that is otherwise to be found in Boston, Chicago, Baltimore and even Cleveland.

Nonetheless, this is how it goes, and has gone, in a big city with a multitude of interests and circles of power -- we see the layers in our history. Once there was Woodland Avenue, where now has emerged a cohesive campus. Once there was the Chinese Wall, where now a tube under Filbert Street links Doylestown and Paoli. Once there was a lively waterfront, where now flows a broad river of traffic on a concrete trestle. The question is whether we let the process play out as it might and hope for the best or to recognize that this city is a fragile organism that responds well to the husbandry of intelligent planning. Can the precious public and private energy that is simmering to develop the city on both grand and modest scales be mediated to the maximum long-term physical effect for Philadelphia? What broad vision of development guides us?

Fifty years ago there were big ideas for Philadelphia and there were figures for change who made powerful ideological and physical statements about the future of the city. Louis Kahn, as a member of the Associated City Planners and in other roles, made transportation studies and inspiring perspectives as he experimented with space and form that would express a modern urban life. The City Planning Commission reformed large tracts of the city, establishing some precincts that preserved its character and some that did not. There were speculators who influenced real estate values and future growth with invested capital. Then, as now, diverse forces were present that shaped the city's growth.

An upcoming planning forum is designed to help shape the city's future.

by Daniel Kelley

When I interview young architects from out of town who are applying for a position in my firm, I ask them why they are moving to Philadelphia. Recently, a woman from Seattle cited that it was the potential of the city that drew her here. I was surprised for a moment, then realized that this was, is and ever will be the veracious response. Having been here for more than 20 years, I have the ambivalence that comes to many Philadelphians who delight in the city's successes and despair in its failures. The young ones are, of course, full of hope.

As an architect and a member of the Design Advocacy Group (DAG), I frame the proposition of "potential" to include the physical place -- the streets, buildings, infrastructure and institutions that define Philadelphia to our eyes and ears. For me, the source of the opposing feelings comes from a question of vision, leadership and willpower in the public and private dominion. The changes to the city that we witness do not emerge fully developed from an oak-paneled room, but are instead the synthesized hurly-burly of politics, citizen action, financing and hubris. When realpolitik is the process, it is possible for this community to initiate a revitalized Independence Mall that will support the city for decades and at the same time build a new baseball stadium in a parking lot where it will serve the commerce of the city



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, there must have been a shared conviction in the community that
future for all -- through a commitment to planning.

he phone number of the City Planning Commission from his Rolodex.
g market forces at times unfettered by planning or by preservation.

The legacy of this practice leaves a question: who is responsible for presenting the visions we need to generate
development that is both brilliant and financially viable? The nonprofit Central Philadelphia Development Corporation
has filled the gap with some compelling ideas and the University of Pennsylvania has recently completed a laudable
master plan. However, there needs to be a groundswell of broad public interest in the spectrum of issues that shapes
the physical city if there is to be more than the disconnected ideas, speculative schemes, insider hijinks, squandered
opportunities and general ballyhoo that have been visited upon us over recent years.

It is a mayoral election year. This presents a chance to make intelligent planning and quality design a political issue --
an issue that people will vote about and an issue that the candidates will take seriously. The Design Advocacy Group is
planning spring and fall forums to articulate the essential subject of the salutary effect of good planning on our beloved
city. More specifically, there will be brief presentations to shape the discussion of transportation (parking), commercial
development, Penn's Landing and preservation for the mayoral election. The forum is free and will be held on Tue., May
6, at 5:30 p.m. in Carpenter's Hall (320 Chestnut St.); there will be another in September.

The pear trees are blooming in Welcome Park, and the water is flowing at Logan Circle -- annual signs of "potential," to
be sure. But it will be inspired planning by community leaders in addition to sustained public attention that will make
Philadelphia a better place in the years ahead.

Daniel Kelley, AIA, is a principal at MGA Partners, Architects and an adjunct professor at Drexel University.



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