

## CHAPTER 8

# ISSUES, CONCERNS, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Introduction

This River Conservation Plan was developed during a time of tremendous activity and effort in planning the transformation of the Delaware waterfront and Delaware Direct Watershed into a more habitable and healthy environment. Many of the plans referenced as the foundation of this RCP (Table 1.1) engaged stakeholders to explore and document issues, concerns and constraints to identify opportunities for progress. The RCP team further explored the state of the watershed from various perspectives, including those of the individuals engaged in the public participation processes related to this RCP (detailed in Chapter 3). Technical information regarding the natural and cultural resources of the watershed (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) provide a more comprehensive picture of the factors that will influence the implementation of planning efforts. This chapter also outlines issues, concerns and constraints associated with the tremendous opportunities at hand.

Overall, the watershed issues identified during the RCP process center on:

- Waterfront access
- Connections between watershed neighborhoods and the Delaware River
- Waterfront development and its effects on existing resources
- Recreation and open space
- Land-based environmental degradation
- Loss of habitat and ecological services
- Water quality
- Stakeholder coordination

### 8.1 – Opportunities

Despite its highly urbanized condition, there are many ways to mitigate the negative impacts of development in the Delaware Direct Watershed and, in some cases, create transformative opportunities. The diversity of natural and cultural resources and the desire for community involvement with waterfront development illustrates true potential. The following opportunities are evidence that sustainable transformation of the Delaware Direct Watershed is already underway.

- **Multiple community planning efforts**

There are more than 30 planning efforts referenced in this RCP. The number of plans affecting the watershed is an indication of the momentum toward improving quality of life and sustainability in the watershed.

- **A unified civic vision for portions of the waterfront**

A Civic Vision for the Central Delaware incorporated an extensive public participation process to ensure that thousands of residents' voices were heard regarding the scope and focus of redevelopment on the Delaware Riverfront.

- **Organizations dedicated to the implementation of waterfront plans**

The Delaware River City Corporation and the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation have developed and implemented projects that have significantly improved waterfront access, recreation and entertainment along the Delaware waterfront. Both organizations have projects in development that will continue to enhance the waterfront experience.

- **Active neighborhood and community organizations**

Most of the watershed's neighborhood and civic groups are fully engaged in improving their communities. New Kensington Community Development Corporation and Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association are only two examples of neighborhood groups that have focused intense effort on improving their communities through planning efforts.

- **Local focus on sustainability**

The City of Philadelphia has made significant gains toward the mayoral commitment to become the greenest city in America through initiatives and incentives for sustainable development.

- **National attention on sustainability**

Sustainability has garnered national attention and popularity. Marketing the idea of sustainability is associated with practically every American industry. Philadelphia's plans for smart growth are in line with this ongoing dialogue.

- **Philadelphia Water Department's (PWD) Green City, Clean Waters plan**

PWD is committed to implementing the Green City, Clean Waters plan, which uses green stormwater infrastructure to reduce Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). This plan seeks to unite the City of Philadelphia with its water environment, creating a green legacy for future generations while realizing ecology, economics and equity.

- **Update to the zoning code**

The Philadelphia Zoning Code Commission is in the process of modernizing the outdated and complex zoning code. These changes promise to preserve the character of neighborhoods and encourage development that meets the needs of the City. The creation of a commission to revise the zoning code in 2007 was supported by nearly 80% of Philadelphia voters.

- **Philadelphia 2035**

Philadelphia 2035 is the City of Philadelphia's first comprehensive plan since 1960. The plan consists of a long range Citywide plan and nineteen Strategic District Plans. Philadelphia 2035 establishes a sustainable, 25-year framework for growth, preservation, economic development, public investment, and the overall physical form of the city.

- **Formation of the Delaware Direct Watershed Partnership**

The Delaware Direct Watershed Partnership that grew out of the RCP process will continue to play a role in managing the watershed resources as the. The partnership will help foster

collaboration and communication between watershed stakeholders essential for improving the health and viability of the watershed.

- **The East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA)**

Dedicated to building an urban greenway connecting the entire Eastern Seaboard, the East Coast Greenway Alliance promotes and supports the vision for connecting local trails into a continuous route. The Philadelphia portions of the greenway will enhance connectivity to the waterfront as well as improve waterfront access and recreational opportunities in the watershed.

- **Philadelphia Complete Streets Executive Order**

In June 2009, Mayor Michael Nutter signed a Complete Streets executive order. This policy aims to balance the needs of all users in the transportation network, including pedestrians and cyclists, potentially leading to a landscape less dominated by automobiles.

- **Reconstruction of Interstate I-95**

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) is in the midst of a long-term, multi-phase infrastructure initiative to expand and rebuild I-95 in Philadelphia. This project provides potential enhanced waterfront connection corridors through reconfiguration of interchanges and improving existing design.

## 8.2 – Issues

The issues identified in this section emerged as a product of both the concerns of the public and the constraints of existing conditions, resources and policy. The following section connects these concerns and constraints to their respective issues. Although these issues are listed separately, they are deeply interrelated. In fact, some issues exhibit overlap of concerns and constraints. Concerns or constraints that apply to multiple issues often result in opportunities for similar processes to make progress toward multiple goals. For example, the conversion of vacant property to open space can improve waterfront access, restore ecological services, provide recreation and mitigate land-based environmental degradation.

### **Waterfront Access**

The issue of waterfront access refers to the need to experience the Delaware River firsthand. Residents and visitors lack sufficient public waterfront access for gathering, boating, walking and biking. This lack of access is a result of development patterns and historical land use. Through public dialogue spurred by the Civic Vision for the Central Delaware and GreenPlan Philadelphia, it was evident that watershed residents highly value their ability to access their rivers for recreational use and to experience the riverscape.

#### *Waterfront Access Concerns and Constraints :*

- Majority of riverfront parcels are under private ownership
- Private communities limit access to the northern portion of the riverfront
- Narrow existing greenway corridor and limited trails
- Lack of green public space
- Fragmented land

- Vacant/misused sites
- Deteriorating structures
- Lack of parking
- Lack of collaboration between public and private sectors

### **Connections between watershed neighborhoods and the Delaware River**

Getting to the Delaware River from the neighborhoods of Philadelphia and beyond poses a significant challenge. Distance is not always the primary factor to access to the river. Many neighborhoods directly adjacent to the Delaware River are disconnected from the river despite close proximity. Without connectivity, access points are irrelevant; the reverse is also true. This issue also affects visitors to the area attempting to experience the Delaware Waterfront as a destination. Connecting the city to the river is a primary focus of this RCP and the complementary plans inventoried for the RCP process.

Some concerns and constraints identified with this issue are:

- Minimal points of public riverfront access from adjacent neighborhoods
- A limited number of streets pass through the barrier created by I-95
- Automobile-dominated landscape and vehicular travel speed
- Poor sidewalk surface quality and lack of upgrades complying with ADA regulations
- Lack of federal, state, local and private funds for transformational urban redevelopment projects
- Lack of common standards for multi-modal streets
- Lack of bike parking

### **Waterfront development and its effects on existing resources**

Development is an essential component to the transformation of the Delaware River Waterfront. Planning efforts are underway to move development toward modes that best serve the City, residents and visitors. There is potential for development to be at odds with the existing cultural and environmental characteristics of adjacent areas.

Some concerns and constraints identified with this issue are:

- Proximity of neighborhoods to proposed development presents a potential conflict of uses
- Proximity of historic resources to proposed development presents a potential conflict of uses
- Effect of development on recreational opportunities along the waterfront
- Lack of parking facilities and impact of parking facilities
- Noise pollution
- Crime and safety
- Increased traffic
- Protection of natural habitat, flora and fauna
- Adverse impact on water quality

### **Recreation and Open Space**

Providing open space and recreational opportunities in the watershed is a major focus of this River Conservation Plan (RCP). Several areas of the watershed lack sufficient access to these amenities. Green space offers many benefits, from stormwater management to environmental

and public health. The public processes associated with this RCP and the complementary plans confirm the need and desire for increased opportunities for recreation and open space. The City of Philadelphia's plan for open space, Green 2015, is poised to create many new opportunities for residents to access open space and recreational opportunities.

Some concerns and constraints identified with this issue are:

- Lack of public green space and trails
- Private ownership of riverfront parcels
- Inability to acquire vacant property
- Safety and traffic concerns
- Development pressures that decrease opportunities for open space
- Urban landscape clutters views of open space
- Automobile-dominated landscape
- Lack of bicycle parking

### **Land-based environmental degradation**

Land-based environmental degradation stems from alteration by human activity. Improving the environmental quality of watershed communities is essential to both public health and economic viability.

Some concerns and constraints identified with this issue are:

- Aging combined sewer infrastructure and combined sewer overflows
- Illegal dumping and litter
- Cost of remediating brownfield sites
- Deteriorating and abandoned structures
- Bulkheads/hardened edges of the riverfront

### **Loss habitat and ecological services**

The ecological services provided by natural areas are essential for the health of watershed flora and fauna. Urbanization has severely affected the natural areas of the Delaware Direct watershed, rendering them unable to support species once present. Stakeholders show great interest in protecting or enhancing the habitats that still exist.

Some concerns and constraints identified with this issue are:

- Conversion of tributaries and streams to sewers
- Illegal dumping in sensitive habitats
- Invasive plant and animal species
- Bulkheads/hardened edges of the riverfront
- Urbanization

### **Water quality of the Delaware River**

Maintaining and improving the water quality of the Delaware River is a consistent theme of the many plans associated with this RCP. Water has an influence on human health and recreation as well as the overall health of ecosystems. The Delaware River provides more than half of the drinking water for the city of Philadelphia.

Some concerns and constraints identified with this issue are:

- Illegal dumping
- Combined sewer overflows
- Poor stormwater management
- Accidents and spills

### **Stakeholder Coordination**

While some of the concerns related to this issue are a matter of perception, collaboration among agencies, organizations and individuals that have a stake in the health of the watershed are essential to meeting the goals set for the river and watershed. The perceived lack of openness and transparency to government oversight and the development process has given some an excuse to disengage. However, the resources and support offered through collaboration can help all stakeholders expand the opportunities for mutual gain.

### **8.3 - Issues Matrix**

In order to connect the issues identified in the primary planning efforts of the RCP, a summary Issue Matrix was prepared. The Issues Matrix (Table 8-1) relates individual plans to the issues and themes that were raised in this watershed.

Table 8.1 – Summary matrix relating planning efforts with the overarching issues identified in the RCP Process

PLAN	ISSUES IDENTIFIED							
	Lack of Waterfront Access	Connectivity	Waterfront Development and its Effects on Existing Resources	Recreation and Open Space	Land Based Environmental Degradation	Loss of Natural Areas and Habitat	Water Quality of the Delaware River	Stakeholder coordination
Delaware Direct Watershed RCP	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Action Plan for the Central Delaware / A Civic Vision for the Central Delaware	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Central Delaware Riverfront Master Plan	X	X	X	X		X		
East Coast Greenway; Blueprint for Action	X	X		X		X		X
Green 2015		X		X				
Green City, Clean Waters				X	X		X	X
GreenPlan Philadelphia				X				
GreenWorks Philadelphia				X	X		X	
Natural Heritage Inventory for Philadelphia						X	X	
New Kensington Waterfront Plan	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Northern Liberties Neighborhood Plan	X	X	X	X		X		
Northern Liberties Waterfront Plan	X	X	X	X		x		
Philadelphia Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan		X		x	X			X
State of the Delaware Basin Report						X	X	X
Water Resources Plan for the Delaware River Basin	X					X	X	X