



NORTH DELAWARE RIVERFRONT, PHILADELPHIA

A LONG-TERM VISION FOR RENEWAL AND REDEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2001

NORTH DELAWARE RIVERFRONT, PHILADELPHIA

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REPORT PREPARED FOR:

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This Report was prepared by a team of design and planning consultants, led by Field Operations, for the City of Philadelphia as part of a large comprehensive urban design planning effort to revitalize ten miles of riverfront land along the Delaware River. The study site runs from just north of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge north to the County Line at Poquessing Creek. Currently, the site comprises mostly industrial land uses – including the Tioga Shipping Terminal, the PECO Electrical Utility Plant, Rohm and Haas, Dietz and Watson, Newman Paper and various other small manufacturing, distribution, and utility functions. At present, one-third of this land is either vacant, publicly owned, or potentially vacant/public. The predominance of past industrial uses, together with the running of I-95 and the N.E. Rail Corridor along the inland flank of the site, have effectively severed this area and the Delaware River from the city and neighborhoods.

The question today is whether or not the city can be reconnected to its river and a new mixture of urban programs and neighborhoods established. Given the vast scale of the land available, together with the spectacular amenities of the river on the one side and the proximity of the I-95 and rail corridor on the other, the site harbors a fantastic potential for the City of Philadelphia – the potential to strengthen its claim as a major metropolitan riverfront city.

RIVER CITIES

CITIES THAT ARE IDENTIFIED WITH THEIR RIVERS:

PARIS - **SEINE**

LONDON - **THAMES**

ST. LOUIS - **MISSISSIPPI**

COLOGNE - **RHINE**

FLORENCE - **ARNO**

VIENNA - **DANUBE**

SEOUL - **HAN**

NEW YORK - **HUDSON**

WASHINGTON D.C. - **POTOMAC**

MONTREAL - **ST. LAWRENCE**

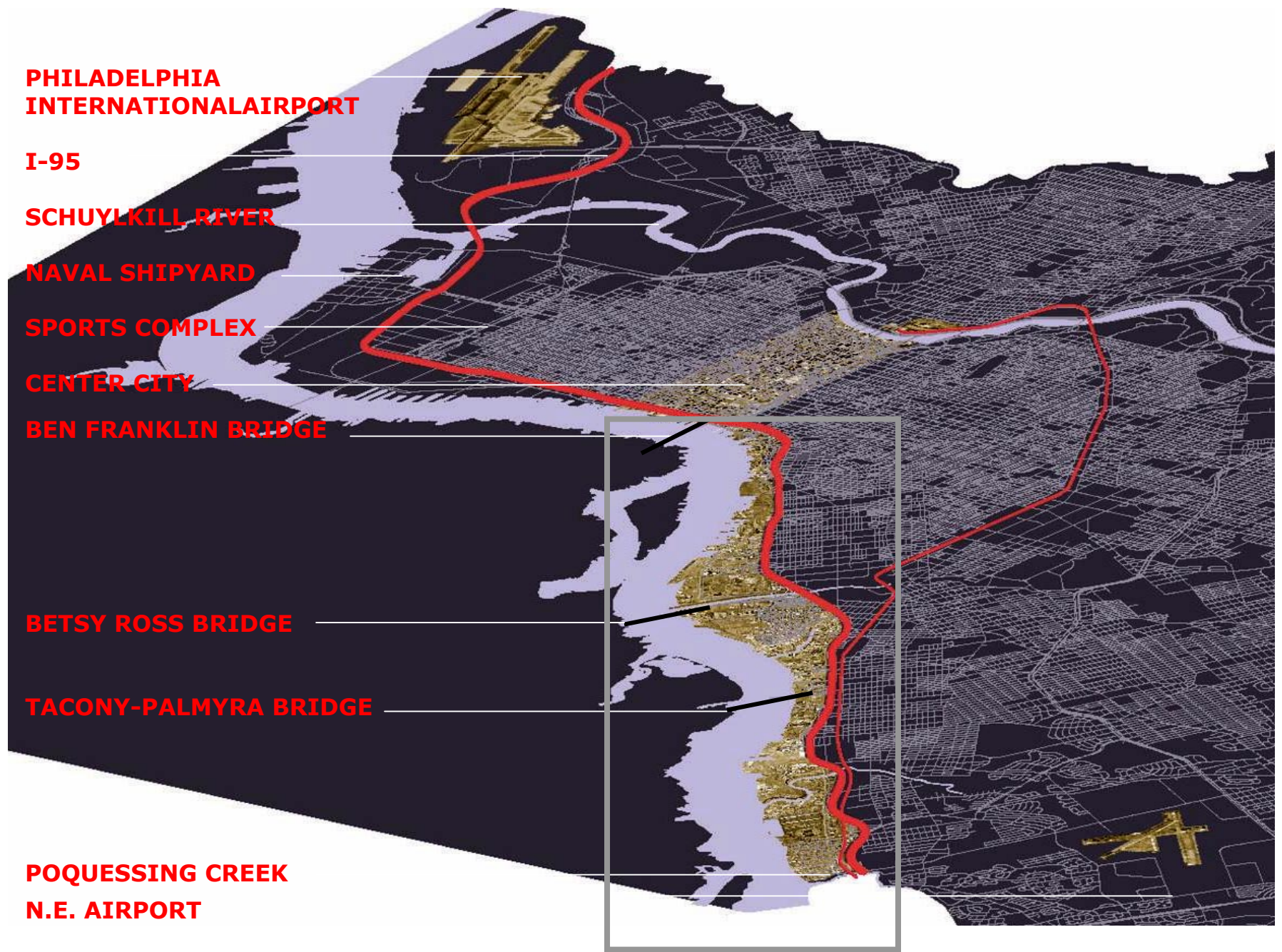
CAIRO - **NILE**

PITTSBURGH - **ALLEGHENY + OHIO**

ROME - **TIBER**

WUNAN - **YANGTZE**

PHILADELPHIA - **DELAWARE ?**



**PHILADELPHIA
INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

I-95

SCHUYLKILL RIVER

NAVAL SHIPYARD

SPORTS COMPLEX

CENTER CITY

BEN FRANKLIN BRIDGE

BETSY ROSS BRIDGE

TACONY-PALMYRA BRIDGE

POQUESSING CREEK

N.E. AIRPORT



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Foreword

Several months ago I invited my colleagues in the region's government and business communities to join me on a boat to cruise the Philadelphia waterfront north of Penn's Landing, knowing that the view would leave a lasting impression.

What they *saw* was mile after mile of vacant buildings and decaying land. What I asked them to see was a revitalized waterfront, with beautiful housing communities, recreational trails and people walking, playing and returning to the riverfront.

I challenged these community leaders to think "beyond the boundaries," fund a study and support a vision to transform this waterfront. I believe that if you make the riverfront accessible to the people, the people will flock to the river for business, housing and fun.

In the following pages you will see a vision, design and plan that I support enthusiastically.

It is a beginning step in a process that could culminate in a "riverfront renaissance" and a renewed spirit of life along the Delaware River.

The Honorable Robert A. Borski
U.S. House of Representatives
September, 2001

The Vision

Cities around the world today are each struggling to radically reorganize in response to the effects of de-industrialization, the growth of suburbs, globalization and the emergence of new technologies. Philadelphia is no exception – in order to gain a competitive advantage over other regional centers and cities, Philadelphia must capitalize upon its assets and position itself in strategically distinctive ways, fully responsive to the demands and opportunities of the contemporary world.

One hugely underutilized asset for Philadelphia is the North Delaware Riverfront. The land looks out across a broad tidal river with spectacular views to a mostly wooded and green New Jersey side. With many gentle banks, beaches and tidal-flats, the river is a great place for fishing, boating and walking. Moreover as destination frontage, it offers prime sites for revenue generating facilities such as restaurants, marketplaces, museums and other cultural amenities, with the inland sites developed as new residential and mixed-use riverfront communities.

There is currently a great opportunity for the City of Philadelphia to transform its relationship to the Delaware River. This opportunity exists because of the shift from industrial economies once centered on the Riverfront to new service and information technologies, and the subsequent shift of the river from a corridor of industry and shipping to one of recreation, leisure and vista. The scale of available land (over 1,000 acres), the proximity of I-95 and regional rail lines, and the magnificence of the Delaware River point to a huge potential for transformation. While the redevelopment of these lands is by no means easy, such difficulties can and should be overcome if the current situation of decline and decay is to be reversed. Other cities around the world are revitalizing their waterfronts as landscapes that bring new distinction and identity, using these investments to stimulate the economy and culture of the entire City. Whereas large upfront costs and long timelines can sometimes prove difficult, the vision and commitment to transform can often produce striking results in only two or three years, at which point the momentum gains a life all of its own.

Developers who are finding it increasingly difficult to build on suburban and exurban sites may now have an opportunity along the North Delaware Riverfront to develop new urban communities that benefit from the proximity to downtown amenities, labor and regional infrastructures, and the recreational and scenic attributes of a magnificent river. Indeed, these extraordinary features can provide a unique and competitive environment to help the City attract and retain households. If more than 80% of Philadelphia's greater metropolitan population lives outside of the City limits, and these centers continue to see growth while the City remains static, how might 3,000 acres of riverfront land set the stage for a reversal of trends?

The Concept Plan and detailed design areas outlined in this Report paint a picture of what the Delaware Riverfront could be. They depict new residential and mixed-use communities, integrated with the neighborhoods and other activities around them, and linked directly to the riverfront as a new public amenity of great scale and opportunity. The Plan is organized around a logic of step-by-step staging that opens the site to public access right from the beginning, changing people's ideas and expectations, and renovating the entire site over a number of years. The phasing sequence allows the City to take the necessary steps to acquire and clean-up the land, install new roads and infrastructure, establish a new riverfront park and ecosystem, and develop parcels for new residential and mixed-use programs. We have projected the capacity of the site to carry at least 10,000 additional residents, new residents who desire the combination of riverfront amenity with easy downtown access. The installation of a new, exquisitely designed River Park, River Road and neighborhood links form the central pieces of the Plan, pieces that ought not be compromised, for the Plan gains its strength from linkage, scale and connectivity.

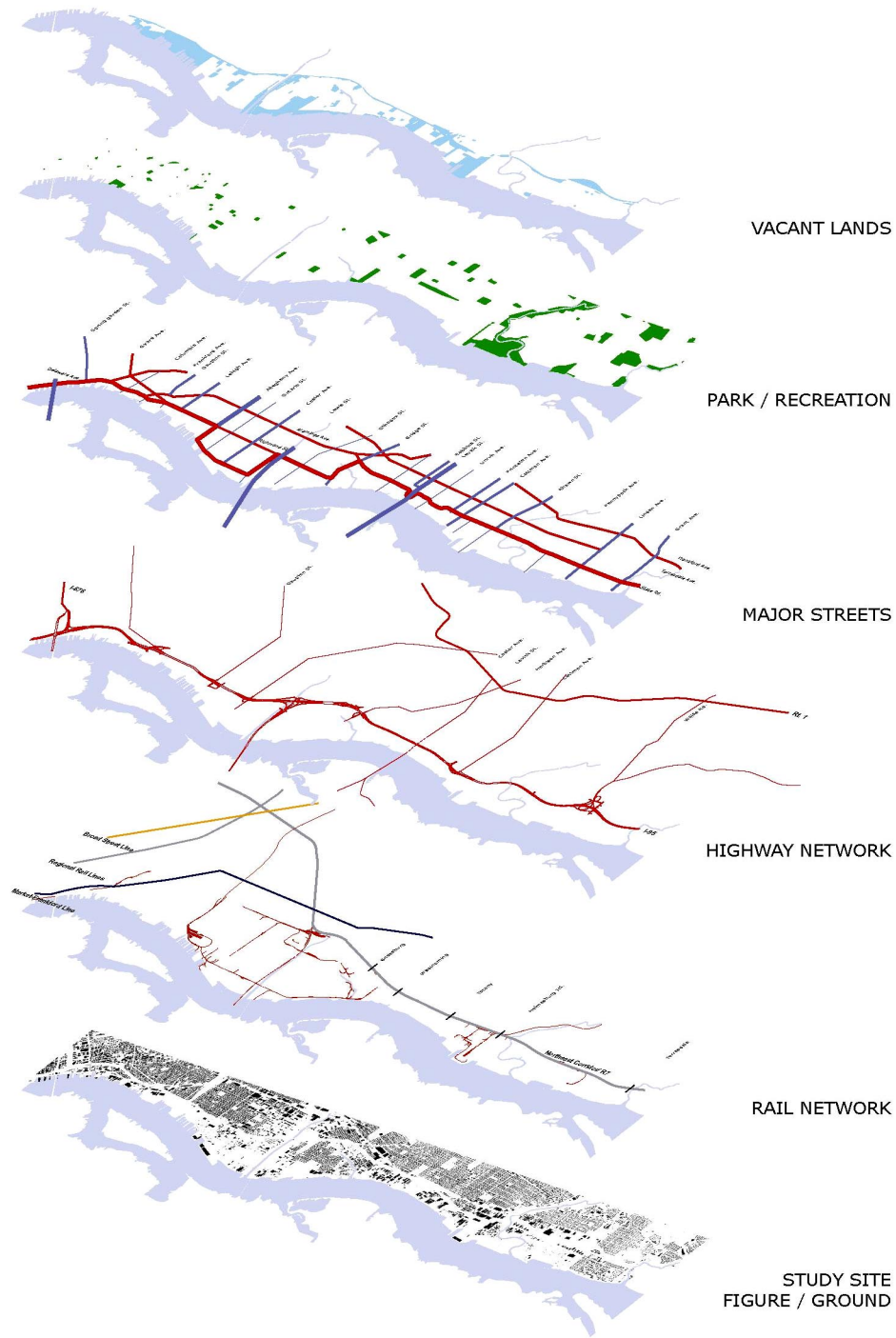
The economic, environmental, programmatic and social gains to be made in redeveloping the North Delaware Riverfront along the lines of those outlined in this Report are enormous. They would literally transform not only the area of the Study Site and its immediate surroundings but also the face and vitality of the entire City.

The Opportunity 2.0

2.1 The Study Site



Composite Infrastructure



Strengths of the Study Site

RIVER AMENITIES

- Big, broad river – spectacular views and amenities
- Distinctive features associated with the river – bridges, piers, outlooks, tidal flats, wetlands, river edge forest, etc.
- Abandoned K&T Rail R.O.W. alongside River – potential public corridor

LAND

- Size of available land reserve (700 – 1100 acres +)
- Availability of large contiguous land parcels
- Perceptible large-scale territory – 3,500 acres + large river space
- Potential to develop over 5,000 new dwelling units, with over 10,000 new residents, plus over 3 million square-feet of office and commercial space

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Easy access to I-95 corridor
- Proximity of Regional SEPTA and N.E. Corridor Rail stops
- Active Port and Freight Rail Links

ACCESS AND MOBILITY

- 10 minutes to Center City by Car
- 10 minutes by Rail
- 20 minutes to International Airport
- 1.5 hours to NYC
- 2.5 hours to Washington DC
- 1 million residents within ten-mile radius

ZONING

- Current “least restrictive” industrial zoning codes encourage land uses that fail to realize the full economic and cultural potential of the land; the area becomes the City’s “backyard” rather than its frontage

ISOLATION

- Negative “front” of trucking roads and large-scale derelict / industrial structures along State Road and Tacony and Richmond Streets
- Limited access to – and even public awareness of - the Riverfront
- Poor linkages back into the neighborhoods

CONFLICTING ISSUES

- Need to allow for continued and new port, industrial and commercial uses in combination with new public riverfront amenities and mixed-use community developments and other programs.

COSTS / IMPLEMENTATION

- Long timeline - twenty to thirty-year development process
- Will need to invest substantial public monies in the short-term (although this will yield significant long-term gains)
- Environmental brownfield and contamination problems with many of the sites
- Uncertain and currently “soft” real estate market

2.2 A Great Opportunity

Failure to move on key aspects of the Plan would have serious deleterious consequences for the area, if not for the larger surrounding City. As long as the area remains zoned for least restrictive industrial land use it will continue to see decline and the addition of more “backyard” uses: trash and recycling facilities, junkyards, distribution centers and the like. While these activities are recognized as important for the functioning and economy of the City, the North Delaware Riverfront is not the site in which to locate them. The unique asset of the Delaware River in terms of identity, amenity, land-value and resource would be completely negated, as development would continue to turn its back to the River. The River would remain largely inaccessible and unknown, hidden behind chain-link fences of marginal, low occupancy land-uses. Only a very small fraction of the potential long-term economic value of the land would ever be realized. And the larger City would lose a magnificent opportunity to transform its identity, its neighborhoods’ relationship to the river, and its strategic opportunity to create a new and unique form of urban vitality.

The Concept Plan allows for the sustained use of the Port and healthy, existing industrial and commercial businesses. But it also allows for the potential building of in excess of 5,000 new residential units and over 3 million square-feet of office / commercial space. This represents a new residential population of more than 10,000 people - each contributing City wage tax, sales tax, and property tax - and also a significant number of new businesses and activities, each contributing to municipal taxes. Our calculations for the redevelopment of the Philadelphia Coke site alone show a net tax benefit to the City of approximately \$3 million in the early years and in excess of \$9 million for subsequent years.

To change the current decline of these fantastic riverfront lands and to move them toward a new future of residential neighborhoods, mixed with riverfront recreational amenities, commercial and cultural facilities, and other uses – some existing, some new – is no small undertaking. It requires bold political leadership and strategic will. But we believe that the Concept Plan outlined in this Report not only paints a vision of what could be, but also lays out the steps to be taken toward realizing those aims. The Plan is realistic, tactical and ambitious. To fail to implement even a small part of it is to condemn over 3,000 acres of prime City Riverfront land to continued dereliction and underperformance. It is also to deny the people of Philadelphia free and generous access to their River.