

Letter to Deputy Mayor for Transportation and Utilities RE: Philadelphia Street Furniture Principles

JANUARY 27 2010

Dear Deputy Mayor Cutler:

These comments on the forthcoming RFP and selection process for Philadelphia's street furniture contract come from the Design Advocacy Group (DAG), Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture), and an informal stakeholders group, Re:Generation. We welcome the attention that is being focused on the appearance and function of Philadelphia's street furniture. We want to help get this project done, and done well.

The purpose of this letter is to offer some general design principles, which we believe will enhance the performance and overall success of the street furniture initiative, without interfering with the proposed timeline or adding significant costs. In fact, these suggestions can help leverage money that has already been invested in community revitalization and help spur further economic development. These standards, if achieved, will enhance the project's overall performance.

Forward-looking standards will also signal to local and visiting pedestrians and transit users that Philadelphia is a world-class city-- where urban design is thoughtfully considered, and regarded as value-enhancing. Adopting a more consistent visual vocabulary for Philadelphia, even for objects seemingly as ordinary as basic streetscape elements, bus shelters, newspaper corrals, newsstands, and bike racks is both good policy and good business. With deliberate goals of design excellence and sustainability, those ordinary objects can define the public space of our city for the next fifteen to twenty years

Preliminary discussions with you provided the context for these recommendations. We are mindful of the following:

- The RFP is scheduled to be issued on or around January 31. Therefore, significant decisions about its details have already been made.

- Established firms, with pre-designed and pre-fabricated lines of street furniture, will likely bid and promote the performance features of their products.

- Some of the components, and in particular bus shelters, will be designed to accommodate advertising to offset fabrication and maintenance costs, and to provide revenue for the city.

FIVE PRINCIPLES

1. Design excellence. People should be inspired by the built environment. Street furniture should fit into the context of Philadelphia's neighborhoods. This will require an adaptive design process that incorporates local consultation, not the cookie-cutter application of one-size fits all prototypes.

2. Citywide impact. The program should be designed to serve the entire city, strengthen business districts, commercial corridors, intersections and neighborhoods, especially those that have been traditionally underserved.

3. Functionality that works and is maintained. The project should showcase how public space can operate in the nexus of design innovation, sustainability and the new personal digital world while addressing traditional urban design criteria. Excellent citywide transit information should be provided on all bus shelters, as well as a digital display of bus arrival times.

4. Philadelphia look. The design vocabulary should be rooted in the distinctive patterns, forms, images, and materials of Philadelphia's existing built environment, but it must endeavor to enlarge that vocabulary in contemporary ways. Some elements should be designed for citywide application, with others to be adapted to local conditions and neighborhood design standards.

5. Advertising restraint. Advertising should be carefully sized and located in such a way that it does not dominate the viewing experience. People should see a bus shelter with advertising, not a billboard with a bench. No elements should be dedicated only to advertising. Advertising should be treated as information and as part of a functional system. The model developed by the Center City District that includes historical reference placards for bus shelters could be



expanded and underwritten by advertising.

We the undersigned offer our support for this endeavor and would welcome the opportunity to work with your office to convene a design advisory group for the vendor selection process, launch and implementation of the project. Such a group would add design expertise, and give additional credibility to the selection process. We look forward to working with you on this exciting program.

Sincerely,

David Brownlee
DAG

Paul Curci
Re:Generation

Christine Knapp
Penn Future