

DEMOLITION IS THE WRONG FIRST STEP ON MARKET EAST

It's good news for Philadelphia that the task force charged with developing a plan for the revitalization of Market East is finally slated to meet next month. It has been over eight months since Mayor Parker announced Jerry Sweeney as the civic leader tasked with leading the revitalization of East Market.¹ As recently as September 23rd, District 1 Councilman Mark Squilla noted that Sweeney's committee had still not convened.² We are hopeful that, as they begin meeting, they articulate an inclusive vision for lively, mixed-use development that weaves together existing structures with new buildings and mixes residential, commercial, and public activity.

That plan does not yet exist.

In the meantime, the sports teams that now own many buildings on the 900 and 1000 blocks of Market Street are already planning to begin tearing them down with nothing more in mind than a "pop up" beer garden or miniature soccer field.³

If popups are wanted by FIFA and the 250th, Market Street already has large demolition sites—the surface parking lot at 13th and Market and the gigantic "Disney Hole" at 8th and Market. Not far away is the gaping void on Jewelers Row, a cautionary tale about premature demolition. These places remind us of past failures where rushed demolition yielded no replacement.

Of course, Market Street needs dressing up in time for the flood of visitors we look forward to in 2026. And pop-ups on existing empty sites should be part of that. But it makes no sense to stage such impulsive demolition on Market Street to create spaces we don't need now for the not yet planned projects that may come next.

Those future plans might even call for the preservation of some distinctive pieces of the old buildings, as large-scale mixed-use developments often do, especially the funky, curvaceous, tile-clad façade of the 1946 Robinson Store. A bit of strategic reuse can provide new developments with some character. But the Robinson Store is slated to be torn down. Once demolished, those opportunities are forfeited forever.

The big crowds that Philadelphia will entertain next year should be encouraged to walk on Market Street between Independence Mall and the Parkway. To welcome them, all the buildings now owned by the Sixers and Flyers on the 900 and 1000 blocks should be cleaned up, illuminated, and their display windows filled with the work of Philadelphia artists and displays that tell the story of this great city of commerce, industry, and art. They might even be filled with indoor pop-ups inside the historic mercantile spaces, providing a poignant connection to the past, as plans are developed and finalized for the imminent future.

2026 is a year to celebrate Philadelphia and build ourselves up—not tear ourselves down.

The DAG Steering Committee

The Design Advocacy Group (DAG) is a public forum and advocate for design quality and equity in the planning, architecture, preservation, and physical development of Philadelphia. designadvocacy.org

¹ Mulligan, Ryan. February 12, 2025. "Parker teases 'significant' funding for new housing, picks Jerry Sweeney to lead on Market East". Philadelphia Business Journal. <https://www.bizjournals.com/philadelphia/news/2025/02/12/cherelle-parker-housing-market-east.html>

² Design Advocacy Group. September 23, 2025. "One-on-One with Councilman Mark Squilla". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6Ya_ww9g1o

³ DiStefano, Joseph and Walsh, Sean Collins. October 24, 2025. "Sixers and Comcast hope to open up a block of East Market for 'pop-ups' during the World Cup and America 250". The Philadelphia Inquirer. <https://www.inquirer.com/business/sixers-flyers-arena-contractors-builders-market-demolition-20251024.html>