

BROAD STREET DESERVES BETTER

GREENING BROAD STREET IS ESSENTIAL. GETTING IT RIGHT REQUIRES A BETTER PROCESS AND A BETTER OUTCOME.

Philadelphia should green Broad Street. Few would argue otherwise.

The goals of Avenue of the Arts 2.0 are admirable. More trees, greater resilience, improved pedestrian comfort, stronger connections to arts and culture, and a more vibrant public realm are all worthy aspirations. As Philadelphia faces rising temperatures, expanding the city's tree canopy and improving public space must be among its highest priorities.

The debate surrounding Avenue of the Arts 2.0 is not whether Broad Street should evolve, but whether a project of this significance has received the discussion, professional scrutiny, and civic engagement it deserves.

We believe it has not.

Broad Street is not simply a transit corridor. It is the ceremonial spine of the city and one of Philadelphia's defining civic spaces. Decisions about its future should be informed by broad public examination.

Instead, many Philadelphians learned about the project only after key decisions had already been made. While the proposal has undergone required reviews and limited stakeholder engagement, it has not benefited from the kind of open citywide conversation that the transformation of Broad Street warrants.

That should concern supporters and critics alike.

Describing the initial phase as a "beta test" only raises a more fundamental question: why were these ideas not subjected to more rigorous evaluation before being built? Beta tests are appropriate for temporary installations. Projects that permanently reshape Philadelphia's principal boulevard should be thoroughly scrutinized before implementation, not afterward.

Broad Street is too important to be shaped by the preferences of any single organization, institution, or civic leader. The boulevard belongs to all Philadelphians, and major decisions about its future should emerge from a public process that evaluates competing ideas and priorities.

For that reason, we believe the City of Philadelphia should assume a stronger leadership role in the future of this effort. Broad Street deserves a process capable of evaluating alternatives and weighing a broad range of perspectives. Philadelphia has no shortage of expertise. What is needed is a framework capable of bringing that expertise together.

The design itself helps explain why.

Not all green infrastructure is created equal. The most successful urban interventions are often the simplest, and not every landscape element performs the same function. A mature tree canopy is environmental infrastructure that cools sidewalks, improves comfort, and supports public life. A planter is simply a means to that end.

Where trees are planted matters.

A tree situated where people walk, gather, dine, and wait for transit delivers substantial public benefit. The same tree planted in the middle of Broad Street primarily shades asphalt. Yet Avenue of the Arts 2.0 places extraordinary emphasis on the median, asking it to manage traffic, support greening, accommodate public art, and create a sense of place. In attempting to serve many purposes simultaneously, the median risks performing none of them particularly well.

The same pattern is evident on the sidewalks.

Rather than maximizing open and flexible pedestrian space, the proposal relies on large, raised planters to organize activity and define zones. These elements consume valuable sidewalk space within an already complex environment of signs, transit infrastructure, utilities, street furniture, curbside activity, and loading operations. Instead of simplifying the experience of moving through the corridor, they risk making it more constrained and fragmented.

Great boulevards rarely depend on elaborate interventions to establish their identity. Their character emerges from generous sidewalks, healthy street trees, active building frontages, strong edges, and clear public space. They succeed through clarity and restraint rather than accumulation.

None of this is an argument against greening Broad Street. Quite the opposite. If the objective is to maximize shade, resilience, and pedestrian comfort, Philadelphia should pursue the most effective urban forestry strategy possible. Continuous or semi-continuous tree trench systems, adapted to existing underground constraints, could provide healthier growing conditions for large-canopy trees while preserving valuable pedestrian space. Planters may still have a role, but they should be employed only where necessary and designed to be as unobtrusive as possible.

This approach may be less dramatic than a corridor filled with monumental planters and sculptural medians, but that is precisely the point. The most successful civic spaces are often defined not by what is added but by what is left open. Good design has the confidence to do less and take advantage of a site's inherent strengths.

These concerns become even more significant when a proposal could ultimately require more than \$100 million in public and philanthropic resources. Investments of that magnitude should be directed toward the strategies that deliver the greatest public benefit and most effectively advance the project's objectives.

Broad Street deserves investment. It deserves more trees, more shade, and a stronger public realm. To get there, it deserves the kind of process that can deliver them.

The DAG Steering Committee