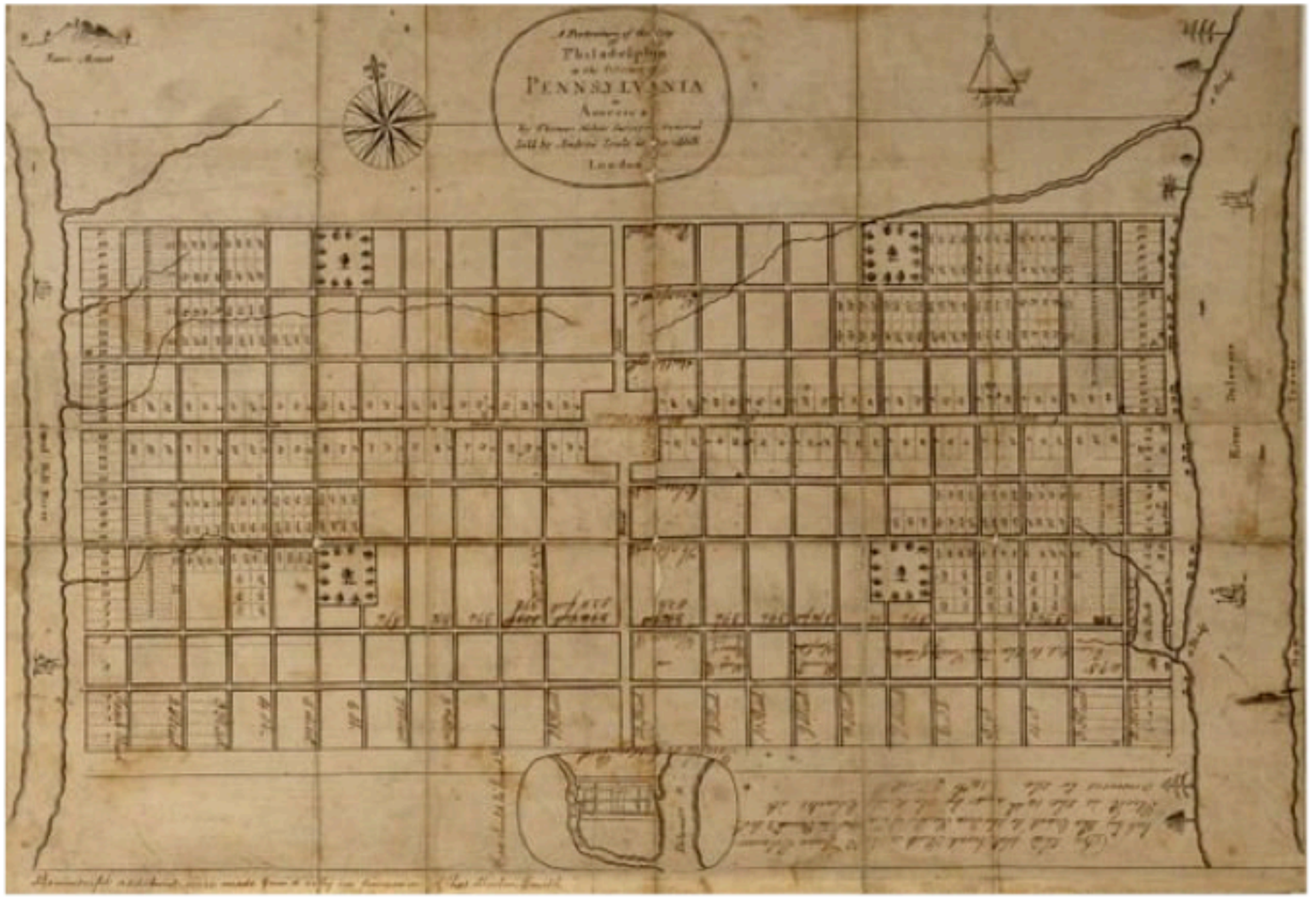
The City of Philadelphia's Ever Evolving Zoning Code

A Comprehensive Guide

A History of Planning

1683: Original City plan with five public squares, organized grid structure, and takes advantage of two rivers which drive trade and industry



Zoning Models

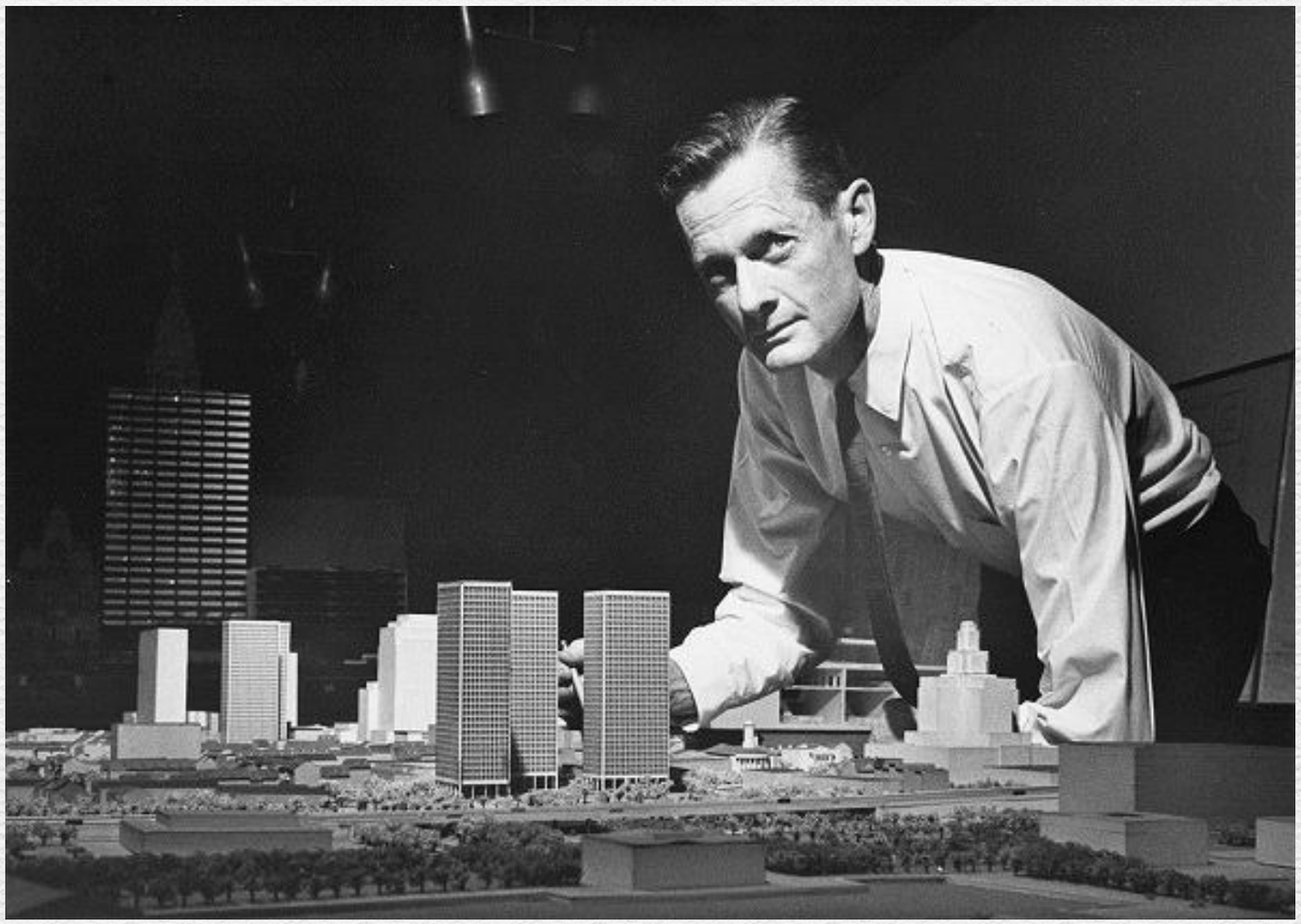
- Euclidean
- Form Based
- Incentive
- Performance
- Modular

Less Flexible for Developers/
Easier for Government to
Regulate

More Flexible for Developers /
More Difficult for
Government to Regulate

Writing a Zoning Code

- 1933 the City enacts its first Euclidean based Zoning Code
- 1942 Planning Department created
- 1962 First major re-write of Zoning Code



Continued Revisions

- 1984 Gentlemen's Agreement Broken
- 1988 Re-write for Center City District to allow for skyscrapers
- Credited with revitalization of the Center City district



Modern Re-Write

- 2007 Voter Referendum creates Zoning Code Commis
- First major re-write in 50 years
- 4 year process
- Goals:
  - Better organization of Code
  - Make construction more predictable
  - Preserve open space/character of neighborhoods
  - More public involvement
  - Encourage positive development and jobs

Did the Re-Write Work?

One Year:

- Requests for variances decrease from 18% to 13%
- Organized Community Involvement
- Increase in sustainability focused projects

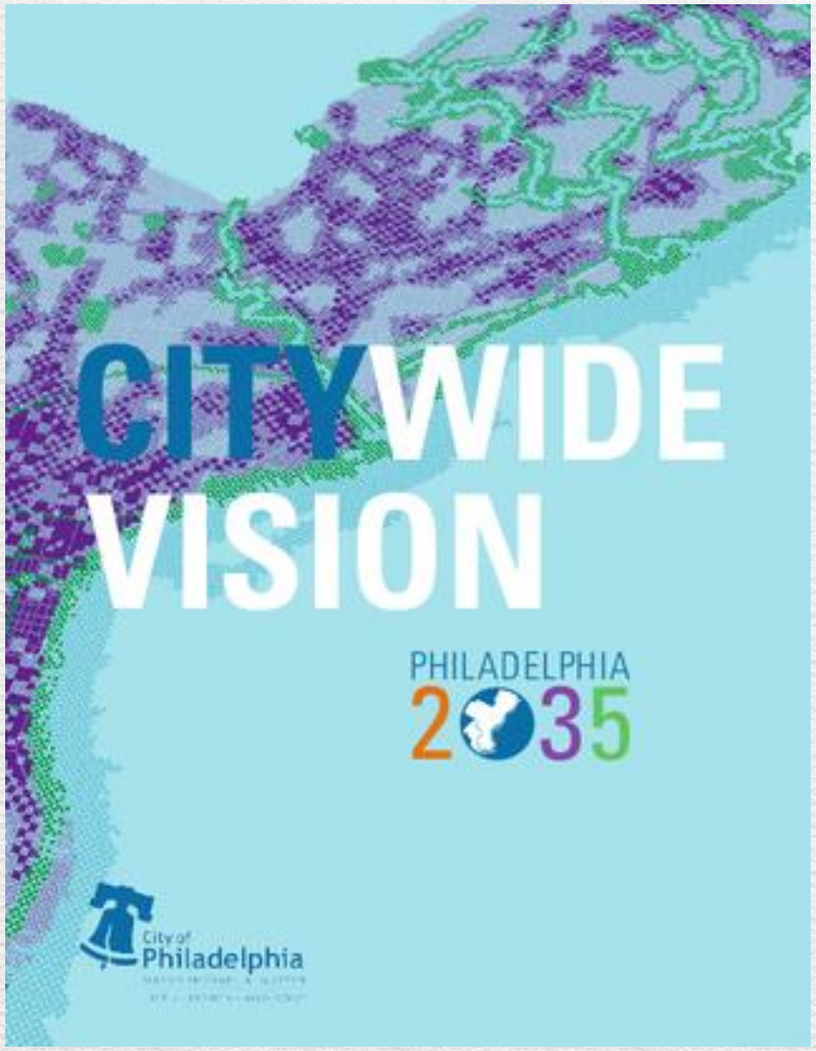
sed flexibility in Code allows for it to change as neighborhoo

- Users report it is easier to use

Five Years Later, Is it Working?

- City Maps are being updated: 4,767 acres updated
- Permits approved by right have increased from 66% to 72%
- Appeals to ZBA have decreased but ZBA denials only increased from 10% to 13%
- RCO involvement allows community input but needs some changes
- Consensus is that Zoning Code is a living document that needs to be reviewed often.

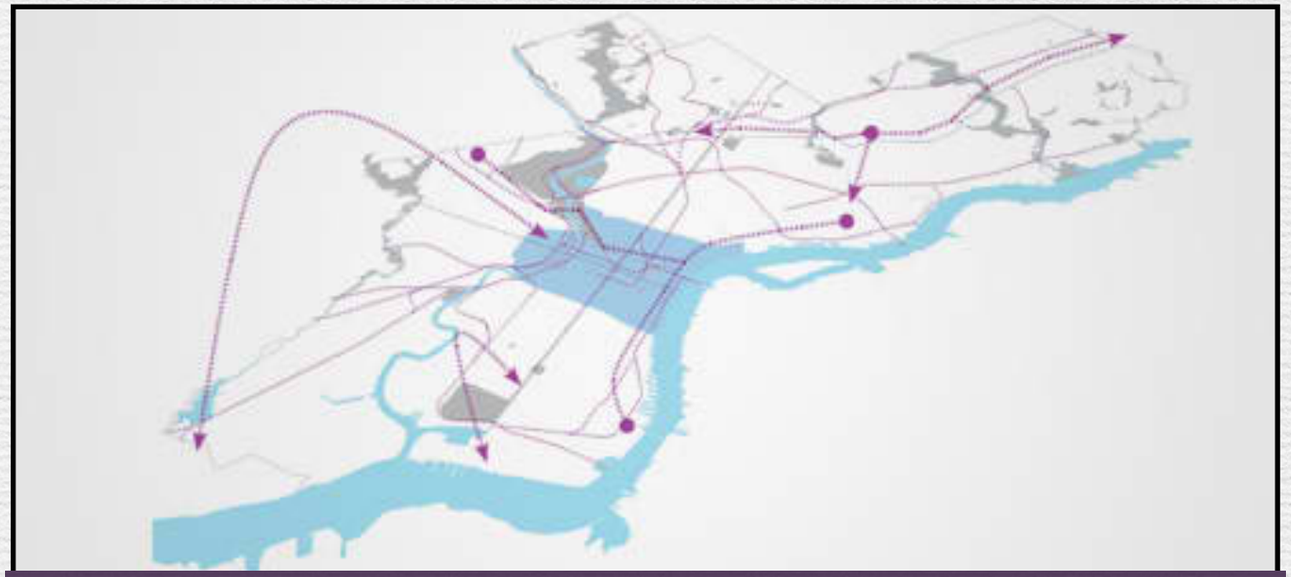
What Still Needs To Be Done?



- Dimensional variances have increased
- Need for multi-family housing
- Does the frequency of appeals being granted undermine City planners intent? Zoning Technical Committee.
- Continued role of Registered Community Organizations?
- Re-mapping continues

Smart Growth?

- Open Space/Historic Preservation
- Affordable Housing
- Sustainable Design
- Blight Controls
- Medical Marijuana/Safe Injection Sites?
- Transit Oriented Development



Philadelphia 2035: Map of Prospective New Transit Opportunities

Zoning Matters

Allows for good governance.

ity can pursue equity and development goals through routin

Can increase citizen involvement.



