

Connection



University City District

The UCD Newsletter • Spring 2015



UCD Working with Gehl Studio to Study Opportunities to Improve Street Life in Eastern University City

University City District (UCD) works hard to create and sustain public spaces to build a stronger and more vibrant University City. In addition to our development of The Porch, the 40th Street Trolley Portal, parklets, and pedestrian plazas, we are now turning our attention to the burgeoning yet under-developed area between the Schuylkill River to the eastern fringe of Drexel University's campus.

In an effort to improve the eastern gateway to University City and strengthen the link to Center City, UCD has partnered with Gehl Studio to develop a strategic framework for impactful and attainable public realm investments for the area, grounded in the observation and analysis of pedestrian behavior. The data we've collected confirms that this area largely (continued on page 7)

UCD Awarded Corporate, Philanthropic Funding

On Tuesday, December 2, University City District was one of nine local nonprofits to receive an **IMPACT Award** from GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) in recognition of exceptional achievements in contributing to a healthier Philadelphia. University City District's award was given specifically for our commitment to building a healthy, vibrant University City through major investments in public space development, public maintenance, and public safety. (continued on page 5)



UCD's Executive Director, Matt Bergheiser, accepts an award from GSK.

Become a Lasting Part of the 40th Street Trolley Portal



Over the past several years, we have worked closely with local residents, SEPTA, and the City of Philadelphia to develop a plan to transform the 40th Street Trolley Portal from a blighted concrete slab into a vibrant community park and transit hub that is safe, sustainable, and social. Thanks to the support of foundations, private supporters, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the City of Philadelphia, we are nearing our fundraising goal that will allow us to break ground on this project in 2015. **But we still need your help.** As of this writing, we are \$3,000 short of our community donation goal, and we are asking you to join our growing roster of dedicated donors and give today. (continued on page 6)



From the Desk of the Executive Director

Daily News reporter Ronnie Polaneczky wrote of the decision to hold the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia: “Stuff tends to get fixed at my house when we know company’s coming... Well, Philly, company is coming.”

Amid the dialogue about what Philadelphia needs to do to prepare itself for an estimated 50,000 DNC guests in July 2016, as well as hundreds of thousands of visitors from outside the region expected to welcome Pope Francis to the Parkway this fall, we at UCD have been doing some thinking about University City’s part in rolling out a suitable welcome mat.

First, it’s clear that first impressions matter. Many of our visitors will make their way here by rail. Before they ever glimpse the Liberty Bell or Independence Hall, they will exit 30th Street Station and surmise what kind of city we’ve become.

For our part, we’ll spend the spring undertaking a “remix” of The Porch with an opportune new splash of colors and amenities. We’ll find new ways to bring whimsy and wonder to The Porch, but we promise not to undo the authenticity and unpretentiousness that have made this space a welcome respite for thousands in the past three years.

We want the masses who speed over the Schuylkill in taxis (or, hopefully, on bike share!) to slow down a bit and admire the grandeur of the Market Street bridge, so we endeavor to extend the vocabulary of The Porch across the bridge. Think more color and more vibrancy to draw westbound pedestrians toward The Porch and the train station, and eastbound traffic toward the bustle of Center City.

While we grapple with first impressions, let’s not forget about lasting ones. I once heard famed architect Laurie Olin say that Paris is a special place for all because it was built for Parisians, not for tourists. As we prepare for throngs of visitors, we also must prepare for five thousand new residents and ten thousand new workers, all the happy result of the \$4 ½ billion building boom in eastern University City.

The lives of future visitors as well as future employees, residents, and students will intersect in University City’s developing public realm. As downtown Philadelphia stretches westward and surface parking lots transform into a new skyline, getting the spaces between the buildings right will be the critical difference between a lively, people-first district and a 1980’s get in-get out downtown. The visionary partnership among Amtrak, Drexel, Brandywine, SEPTA and others to transform community, connectivity and identity around 30th Street Station is focused on this goal. At the same time, UCD has partnered with Gehl Architects to re-imagine barren streetscapes as verdant, social spaces and to undertake a dozen or so moderate scale interventions that reinforce the power and appeal of place for employees and residents of a burgeoning innovation district. And, ultimately, we aspire to double down on long-term investments in The Porch, as the new neighborhood emerging around us warrants Philadelphia’s sixth civic square.

So while we’ll make an important down payment on vitality today to impress our guests, it’s critical that we invest smartly in the long-term splendor of a place whose current growth promises to shape Philadelphia’s economy for decades to come. Political commentator and Philadelphia native Chris Matthews said of our DNC bid vis-à-vis the competition that we “will bring a spirit to the convention...that you don’t get in Columbus or Brooklyn.” While that spirit will be felt city - and region-wide, University City will play a special role in welcoming those who are here to visit, and an extraordinary part in shaping the 21st century metropolis for those who are here to stay.

Sincerely,

Matt Berghaiser
Executive Director
University City District

UCD Releases In-depth Report on Parklets



In 2011, University City District, working with the City of Philadelphia, installed the city’s first Parklets. These temporary seating platforms, placed flush with the curb, created an extension of the sidewalk by replacing just one or two parking spaces with a small new park. The Parklets have been remarkably successful at attracting users since the day they were installed. Seeking to provide both numbers-driven analysis and to serve as a guide for other cities considering turning parking space into temporary parks, UCD released its report *The Case for Parklets: Measuring the Impact on Sidewalk Vitality and Neighborhood Businesses*. The report seeks to quantify the Parklets’ ability to attract and retain users, the diversity of the users and uses, the impact on the sales at adjacent businesses, and the micro-scale environmental factors contributing to their success or failure. We intend for the report, with 12 pages of full-color charts, graphs, and photos, to serve as a blueprint for other organizations considering building and installing Parklets. You can download the paper at bit.ly/parkletreport.

University City District Report

ucd University City District

The Case for Parklets: Measuring the Impact on Sidewalk Vitality and Neighborhood Businesses

OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

University City District (UCD) works to improve economic vitality and quality of life in the University City area of Philadelphia, by investing in world-class public spaces, addressing crime and public safety, and bringing life to commercial corridors. In 2011, UCD, working with the City of Philadelphia, installed the city’s first Parklets. These temporary seating platforms, placed flush with the curb, created an extension of the sidewalk by replacing one or two parking spaces with a small new park. That dry definition though belies the strikingly vibrant little hubs of activity that these new public spaces have become in our residential neighborhoods and on our commercial corridors.

The Parklets have been remarkably successful at attracting users since the day they were installed. For noted urbanist William H. Whyte, when it comes to good urban spaces, “supply creates demand. A good new public space builds a new constituency. It stimulates people into new habits.” That was clearly the case at the Parklets. From early morning to late evening, many Parklets were constantly occupied by people eating, drinking, socializing, or working. Photos showed up on social media, and crucially, businesses

reported impressive sales increases after their neighboring Parklets arrived. While these reports were compelling, and successful Parklets were being reported in San Francisco and elsewhere, our evidence for their positive impact remained anecdotal. Research on Parklets in New York City and Los Angeles had documented high levels of use in central business districts, but limited data, if any, were available on Parklet performance outside of downtowns and very high density neighborhoods, including:

- Their ability to attract and retain users;
- The diversity of their users and uses;
- Their impact on the sales at adjacent businesses; and
- The micro-scale environmental factors contributing to their success or failure.

In other words, how effective were Parklets at bringing more life to our public spaces and more feet to our neighborhood businesses, and could we use that information to predict whether a Parklet would be successful elsewhere?

During the 2013 Parklet season, UCD conducted an intensive data collection and analysis effort to answer these questions. This report contains those results, and as cities, suburbs and towns strive to improve their walkability and energize their public spaces, we hope that our findings can help other communities determine if Parklets are an appropriate urban design solution for them. As a relatively new form of “tactical urbanism,” Parklets are still likely to encounter some resistance, particularly as they may require a minor loss of parking. It is our hope, however, that these data can help advocates make the case for Parklets as cost-effective enhancements to the urban streetscape and quality of life, and identify the locations in their communities where Parklets are most likely to succeed.

Project Rehab: Update on 31 N. Preston Street

Project Rehab, UCD’s program that works creatively and comprehensively to unlock the economic potential of vacant and underutilized properties and to leverage private investment in their redevelopment, continued helping local property owners this fall. Last summer we told you about 31 North Preston Street, a two story, 3 bedroom single family home that sat as a vacant shell for years due to delays in funding. Project Rehab got involved in August of 2012 and has helped the owner secure the necessary funding from East River Bank, select a contractor, and receive an accurate appraisal, turning a run-down house purchased at a sheriff’s sale for \$23k into a property appraised for \$465,000. The house’s rehabilitation has begun, including digging out and installing a new foundation and demolishing specific portions of the building. We expect the property to undergo significant cosmetic changes in the coming year.



UCD Offers Assistance to Neighborhood Businesses

Have you noticed improved storefronts in the neighborhood recently? Are you a business owner who would like help upgrading your facade or signage? UCD supports neighborhood commercial corridors throughout the district by offering technical assistance and other incentives related to business recruitment and retention, and works closely with property owners and real estate brokers to recruit businesses for their properties. We've helped existing businesses obtain grants from the Philadelphia Commerce Department's City's Storefront Improvement Program and The Merchants Fund, providing much-needed funding that made critical improvements possible.



After working with UCD to make physical improvements to his business, Scott Lee, the longtime owner of Lee's Deli at 47th and Baltimore, told us, "The overwhelming support I have received from the University City District has given me strength to continue my work at Lee's Deli, and for that, I am forever grateful. I believe in the power of small businesses to positively impact the community in which they serve, and I believe that change is always more doable when people work together." To learn more about the program, please contact Jon Potter at jon@universitycity.org.



Businesses UCD has assisted with storefront improvements:

- Lee's Deli at 47th and Baltimore
- Nick's Discount at 47th and Baltimore
- Fu Wah Mini Mart at 47th and Baltimore
- Gush Gallery at 50th and Baltimore
- Sina's Fresh Donuts at 40th and Market

New Business Spotlight

Retailers continue to build their brands in University City and add to an already robust commercial scene. Here is a recap of what has opened recently:

8 Limbs Academy: Muay Thai Kickboxing Gym
4542 BALTIMORE AVENUE

48th Street Grille: Caribbean & American Cuisine
310 S. 48TH STREET

Chattime: Japanese Food
3608 CHESTNUT STREET

Hai Street Kitchen: Contemporary Japanese
125 S. 40TH STREET

Hello World: Clothing and Home Goods
3610 SANSOM STREET

Hotbox Yoga: Yoga Studio
3527 LANCASTER AVENUE

Jake's Sandwich Board: Sandwich Shop
125 S. 40TH STREET

Nom Nom Ramen: Hakata-Style Tonkotsu Ramen
3401 WALNUT STREET

Pedego: Electric Bike Sales and Rentals
3100 SPRING GARDEN STREET



Redcap's Corner: Tabletop Gaming Store
4812 BALTIMORE AVENUE

Repair the World: Jewish Volunteer Group
4029 MARKET STREET

Santander: Bank
3802 CHESTNUT STREET

United by Blue: Coffee Shop & Outdoor Apparel
3421 WALNUT STREET

The Bar(n) on Baltimore: Bar & Night Life
4901 CATHARINE STREET

Wahoo's Fish Taco: California-Style Mexican Food
3180 CHESTNUT STREET

William Street Common: Beer Garden
3900 CHESTNUT STREET

Zesto Pizza & Grill: Pizza and American Food
125 S 40TH STREET

News from the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative



University City District's West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI), the innovative job training program that connects West Philadelphia employers to West Philadelphians seeking job opportunities, continued its successful program with new cohorts, new generous donations, and new ways of making a difference in the community.

Valet Program Wraps with Solid Results

On February 13, WPSI's shortest training session to date closed on a high note when 15 West Philadelphians received conditional job offers after just two weeks in the classroom. Despite limited training time, participants gained a better understanding of standard business practices while improving their customer service skills, and were able to successfully connect with one of the region's largest parking management companies. Additionally, redesigned resumes netted the group 71 calls and 35 interviews after an average of 17 months of unemployment.

Upcoming Opportunity for Employment

The next cohort of the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, beginning in late March, will benefit West Philadelphians interested in building careers in landscape maintenance. Over 12 weeks of paid training, participants will learn hands-on technical skills as well as business development strategies. This program pilots a new social enterprise model that brings together institutional partners, for-profit service providers, and nonprofit organizations committed to building the local economy while beautifying West Philadelphia's public spaces.

WPSI Supports Leadership Development

In February, WPSI led an innovative training session on workplace socioeconomics for Drexel Leaders 2020, a program designed to build capacity among senior leaders at Drexel University and Drexel College of Medicine. The group explored the "hidden norms" of class in the workplace, focusing on practical ways to effectively communicate across differences. This workshop typifies WPSI's holistic approach to facilitating career success and building the local economy as it helps both managers and entry-level workers find common ground in the workplace.

WPSI Receives Continued Support from CEO

UCD's West Philadelphia Skills Initiative is proud to be a part of the Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity's (CEO) Shared Prosperity Jobs and Training Initiative, a strategy to provide workforce training and job placement support to low-skill workers that puts individuals on a career pathway to a job with a family-sustaining wage. This program is partially funded by DCED, through the Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity.

Funding (continued from cover)

UCD was also one of four local organizations to earn a **Win-Win Challenge Planning Grant** from Job Opportunity Investment Network (JOIN), a partnership of funders—primarily philanthropic organizations and the public sector—who come together to support innovative, creative job training projects. We were awarded the planning grant for our University City Landscaping Trades Social Enterprise, a new program that will leverage the accomplishments of our West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) and our depth of experience maintaining the physical vibrancy of University City to develop in-house horticulture services.

UCD Staff Updates



Tom Patterson, who has worked with UCD for ten years, has been promoted to manager of our Public Space & Maintenance division. In this capacity, Tom will coordinate and direct operations responsible for providing cleaning and maintenance of University City's public spaces, will oversee fee-for-service contracts, and will research and implement opportunities to improve UCD's clean and safe operations while responding to community concerns in the areas of public safety and cleanliness. Tom lives in South Philadelphia with his wife. He enjoys watching sports and is a lifetime fan of the Washington Redskins.

Daniel Wolf accepted a position as Planner / Project Manager in October 2014 after spending time as an intern for UCD. In his new position, he will work to enhance the public realm in University City through placemaking and improving the environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. Originally from the Boston area, Daniel studied Psychology as an undergraduate at Tufts University, and he holds a Master of City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. Daniel lives in Spruce Hill and enjoys experimenting in the kitchen, playing music, practicing Judaism, and exploring new places on his folding bicycle.



Shawn Ryan has joined UCD as our new Graphic Design and Web Development Manager. Prior to UCD, Shawn was Senior Designer for World Cafe Live in University City. Shawn graduated from Millersville University with a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design. Aside from pushing pixels and crafting compositions, Shawn also enjoys traveling, bicycling, exploring Philadelphia, and endlessly searching for rare records.



Trolley Portal (continued from cover)

If you donate \$250, UCD will thank you by etching an 8" x 8" asphalt paver with a dedication message of your choosing—perhaps you would like to honor a friend or family member, or join together with neighbors to make a gift on behalf of your block. At higher gift levels, you can adopt and dedicate a native shade tree or have a plaque placed on the custom seat walls bounding the butterfly garden.

This is an unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate your love for our neighborhood as we build this new community asset together. To donate, please visit:

universitycity.org/40th-street-trolley-portal-campaign

or contact our Director of Development Sarah Davis at 215.243.0555 x 226 or sarah@universitycity.org. Thank you in advance for your support.



Help us keep working for you. Support UCD.

DONATION FORM

circle one **\$250** **\$100** **\$50** **other**

I have enclosed my check for _____ payable to University City District. **Name** *please print* _____

Please charge my credit card circle one **AmEx** **MasterCard** **Visa** **Company** _____

Account Number _____ **Address** _____

Expiration Date (MM/YY) _____ **Security Code** _____

We cannot process your donation without the security code! **Phone** _____

I would like this gift to recur circle one **Monthly** **Quarterly** **Email** _____

Signature _____

Cut along the dotted line and mail this form to: **University City District, 3940 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104**

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To make a secure, online donation to UCD, please visit:

www.universitycity.org/donate

Gehl Study (continued from cover)

functions like a traditional central business district, where the majority of pedestrian activity is generated by people walking to and from work, with an additional peak of activity during the lunch hour. However, as new development takes place, there will be an increasing need for a vibrant network of public spaces to support it. Beyond the existing hubs of activity—at 30th Street Station, the new restaurants and residences at Chestnut Square, and around Drexel's campus—there exist several underutilized spaces, presenting opportunities to provide more inviting spaces. We have also learned where the configuration and design of streets and paths present barriers to walking comfortably through the area.

Our upcoming report will present a series of strategic pilot projects, aimed at the following goals: through creative programming, we want to expand hours of activity and invite new users to stay longer; we want to work toward a safe, comfortable, and stimulating walking environment with human scale and an authentic sense of place; and we hope to shift the area toward the dynamic and magnetic neighborhood it aspires to be. We look forward to sharing ideas as they become finalized.

New Upgrades on the Horizon for The Dirt Factory



UCD's Dirt Factory, the city's only free community composting facility, has recently begun work with a team of Senior Drexel Environmental Engineering students on plans to modify and improve the function of The Dirt Factory, as well as conduct site analysis and community outreach for a second facility in the neighborhood. They have also been meeting with the EPA and University City institutions to work on collective efforts to reduce food waste in our neighborhood. The Dirt Factory remains open for drop-offs of household food waste at 4308 Market Street on Wednesdays from 5-6PM and Saturdays from 10:30-11:30AM. Check our website for a list of acceptable materials for drop off.

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SAVE THE DATES!

Baltimore AVENUE
**DOLLAR
STROLL**



June 25, 2015
September 24, 2015



July 16-26, 2015

