Press Release

For Immediate Release

City of Philadelphia Department of Records Awarded NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant to Create Augmented Reality Prototype for its *Philly*History.org Web Application

Popular Geographically-enabled Website Plans to Enable Users to Overlay Hundreds of Historic Photos on Actual City Locations Right from their Smart Phones

Philadelphia, April 16 , 2010 – The Philadelphia Department of Records announced today that it received an NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up grant to develop a prototype augmented reality application for *Philly*History.org (www.phillyhistory.org), the online geographic database of the Philadelphia City Archives' collection of historic photographs of the city and maps. Utilizing a combination of the GPS and camera technologies available on contemporary smart phones, this mobile phone application will enable users to view the historic photographs from *Philly*History.org as overlays on the current urban landscape. Azavea, the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software design and development firm that originally created *Philly*History.org, will also build the augmented reality prototype.

Today, from a search performed from their iPhone or smart phones, *Philly*History users are able to compare the *Philly*History.org's collections with the location at which they are standing. And if they are not standing in the street, they can also access contemporary 360-degree street level views to see what the area looks like today thanks to the system's integration with Google Street View and Google Earth. However, augmented reality technology is different in the sense that it enables users to access additional information about the world around them in relation to their location as they point directly at it with their smart phone. Once an augmented reality application has been downloaded to a user's smart phone, there is no need to access a traditional website or even enter a street address or other search criteria in order to use it. The augmented reality data appears as an overlay on the camera display and can be paged through much like standard web pages. The Department of Records will initially provide point-and-view access to a subset of approximately 500 historic photographs of selected sites around the city for the prototype application, and users will be able to automatically access and page through the historic photographs by simply pointing a smart phone at the contemporary site.

The prototype application will focus on the several neighborhoods around the downtown area. A range of neighborhoods will be used in order to evaluate issues such as tree cover, building height and other sources

for multi-path error that may affect the accuracy of the augmented reality display. In addition to the 500 photographs, the project team will work with an advisory committee, three of whom are the co-editors of the planned *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, to provide additional interpretive information for up to 20 of the 500 sites.

The Department of Records hopes that this innovative application will enable Philadelphia to share its heritage with students, architects, historians, tourists and other users in an entirely new way. The prototype application which will target the iPhone and Android phone platforms will therefore be provided as free downloads through the respective app stores.

"We are grateful for this incredible support from NEH, which enables us to give access to rich and perishable photo and map collections to the public. We started the site with 80 photos and have now reached 79,000, making *Philly*History.org one of the most important historical photographic resources in the nation and a learning tool that transcends the traditional classroom. The project is a true commitment from the City of Philadelphia, funders, and the public to make history freely accessible to all." – Joan Decker, Commissioner, Department of Records.

About Azavea (formerly Avencia)
Azavea is an award-winning geospatial analysis (GIS) software development firm specializing in the creation of location-based web and mobile solutions, as well as geospatial analysis services to enhance decision-making processes. Azavea is committed to working on projects with a strong social value component in order to promote the emergence of more dynamic, vibrant, and sustainable communities. Each of Azavea's projects, products and pro bono engagements showcases this commitment. Azavea is a certified B Corporation. For more information, visit www.azavea.com

About the Philadelphia Department of Records
The Home Rule Charter of 1952 established the Department of Records to ensure that Philadelphia's municipal records are appropriately controlled and managed. The Department sets records management standards and procedures for all departments, boards, commissions and agencies, and it manages key central recordkeeping operations and services such as the City Archives, the Records Storage Center, the Recorder of Deeds and the Central Reprographics Services. www.phila.gov/Records/

About the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
This project is supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities through its Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant Program.

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities. NEH grants enrich classroom learning, create and preserve knowledge, and bring ideas to life through public television, radio, new technologies, museum exhibitions, and programs in libraries and other community places.

Information about the awarded project is available: http://www.neh.gov/ODH/Default.aspx?tabid=111&id=152

###