



## **FRANKFORD CREEK REDEVELOPMENT AREA PLAN**



**PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION**

*November 19, 2002*



**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

John F. Street, Mayor

**PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION**

Gary Hack, Chairman

Jeffrey S. Batoff, Vice Chair

Lynette M. Brown-Sow

James J. Cuorato

Janice Davis

Gloria Levin

Marcia Moore Makadon

Estelle Richman

Maxine Griffith, AICP, Executive Director

Richard L. Lombardo, Deputy Executive Director

**COMMUNITY PLANNING DIVISION**

Richard Redding, Acting Division Director

**REPORT BY**

Shari Cooper, Northeast Philadelphia Planner

**Maps and GIS analysis by**

Bryan Lightner

**PCPC INTERNS**

Gabrielle Grode

James Johnson-Piett

# FRANKFORD CREEK REDEVELOPMENT AREA PLAN

*for the area generally bounded by:*

**Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue,  
Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, and Hunting Park Avenue**

## INTRODUCTION

The Frankford Creek Redevelopment Area lies alongside the Frankford Creek and includes the neighborhoods of Frankford (population 31,572) and Juniata Park (population 35,461). The boundaries of the Redevelopment Area include Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue, Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, Cayuga Street, "O" Street, and Hunting Park Avenue.

Both Frankford and Juniata Park are geographically situated between I-95 and Roosevelt Boulevard. Each neighborhood shares a critical natural feature and amenity: the Frankford Creek. Although this creek physically separates the neighborhoods, it does not create a barrier between the revitalization efforts of the two communities. This may be because the Frankford Creek is a shared feature between the two neighborhoods, as each community has residential areas that abut to the creek. On both sides of the creek, homes are intermixed with older, industrial properties, which impose a blighting influence on their residential neighbors.

Additionally, these industrial users tend to use the majority of the land for outdoor storage or industrial activity. Other lots go largely unmanaged and experience a high amount of natural overgrowth.



*Industrial User adjacent to Frankford Creek and Frankford Residences*



*Frankford Creek Study Area*

Unfortunately, these uses do not contribute to a desirable quality of life, nor do these uses maximize or appreciate the natural amenity the creek brings to bear. The return for the community could potentially be much larger than for what current conditions allow.

The impetus for this redevelopment plan follows a proposal submission for housing development along the Frankford Creek, by the Frankford CDC. This proposal involves creating approximately 54 town homes on a site bordered by Frankford Creek, Wingohocking Street, and Cayuga Street. This proposal responds to the community's desire

to reinstate the creek to its natural setting and develop it primarily into a recreational and residential showpiece for the area. The Frankford CDC wishes to create a rich and stimulating "place," appropriately planned and designed for the 21st century.



*Townhouses at Frankford Creek (Conceptual Rendering)*

In addition to facilitating this proposal, The Philadelphia City Planning Commission seeks to encourage redevelopment in a broader perspective around the creek. Specifically, PCPC hopes to work collaboratively with other agencies, non-profit groups, and elected officials to clean up the area and transform the edges of both neighborhoods. We believe this project can have a significant impact on the neighborhoods bordering the creek, as well as the Near Northeast area as a whole.

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT:  
FRANKFORD AND JUNIATA PARK**

Frankford is a neighborhood rich in history and strong in community. However, Frankford has experienced significant deterioration over the years in terms of its physical, economic, and social fabric.

In response to these problems, the Frankford CDC, alongside various other community groups, has been working to revitalize and redevelop the more dilapidated parts of the neighborhood, particularly the housing stock.



*Homes near the Frankford Creek*

The housing stock in Frankford, specifically within the study area, is fairly old, quite dense, and small in scale. Most of the homes in the study area were built in the late 1800s and early 20th century when inexpensive homes were built for workers of nearby factories. In fact, some of these homes hold historic value, reflecting the original development along the Frankford Creek.

Several of these older homes, and particularly the dilapidated wooden-frame structures, fell into disrepair over time and were demolished. As a result, many vacant lots and side yards are strewn throughout this residential section. Currently, many of these side yards are either overgrown lots or are being used for outdoor storage. Other lots are being maintained as open space.



*Vacant lots and deteriorating properties in Frankford*

By today's housing standards, the homes that remain cannot compete in today's residential marketplace. The homes in this area are considered too small and "outdated". Additionally, today's higher-value residential neighborhoods are separated from industrial uses, unlike most of the properties in these communities where several auto-related businesses exist adjacent to small homes.

Indeed, for such a dense residential area, maximum utilization of open space figures as a necessity as well as critical amenity. The potential amenity of the creek, along with green landscaped spaces, offers a high return on investment for developers, as well as homebuyers. Currently, the land development potential is not being realized. This is reflected in the housing value chart below. Although the housing values have increased they still have not kept up with the citywide rate as a whole.

CENSUS HOUSING VALUES			
	1990	2000	% Change
FRANKFORD	\$25,600	\$29,600	+15.63%
JUNIATA PARK	\$46,600	\$54,100	+16.09%
PHILADELPHIA	\$47,400	\$59,500	+23.34%

Juniata Park, however, experiences marginally healthier housing values. Generally, the row-style homes in Juniata Park are in good condition. Most of the row homes here were built in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The residential blocks in this neighborhood were much more consciously planned and were designed to be more contiguous in residential space, in order to strengthen community connections. However, certain sections along "O" Street and Hunting Park Avenue are beginning to experience a number of vacant or boarded-up homes (see photo below).



*"O" Street in Juniata Park*



*Vacant commercial property in Juniata Park*

**Vacant Properties**

Alongside the vacant residential properties in Frankford, there are a number of underutilized parcels, formerly used by large industrial factories alongside the Frankford Creek. Today, however, these buildings are obsolete in the modern industrial marketplace. As a result, many low-end auto-related uses (body work/repair, maintenance, and salvage) have moved in to these oversized large spaces. Consequently, many of these businesses reflect underutilization or are largely vacant.

In Juniata Park, there are also other vacant commercial properties occurring at the intersection of Adams Avenue and Orthodox Street, where an ACME grocery store once existed. There is also concern that the adjacent K-Mart will soon be closed because of the recent bankruptcy of the parent corporation.

Further south on Castor Avenue in Juniata Park, there are several other vacant stores in the Juniata Park Shopping Center. This level of vacancy reflects the area's inability to perform in an economically desirable manner.

**Recreation**

Across the street from the Juniata Park shopping center is the Juniata Golf Course. Along with the sizeable Piccoli Playground, this golf course is one of the most outstanding natural features in the neighborhood.

This local amenity is a beautifully landscaped golf course, occupying approximately 114 acres. The meandering stream of the Frankford Creek bisects the golf course, emphasizing its



*Frankford Creek at the Juniata Park Golf Course*

undulating grounds and accentuating its pastoral views. Other playgrounds exist downstream from the golf course, which creates the possibility of having community open spaces linked by a contiguous greenbelt alongside the creek. Future extension of this greenbelt could also be planned to eventually connect to the North Delaware Riverfront, similar to the Pennypack Creek and Park.

### **THE FRANKFORD CREEK**

After the stream passes through the Juniata Golf Course, it abruptly crosses over to a more industrial section within the neighborhood. Current analysis reveals that the Frankford Creek suffers from industrial and waste contamination. Beginning at this point, the creek is in desperate need of environmental remediation. Moreover,



*Frankford Creek directly across from the Juniata Golf Course*

these conditions present an "unsafe, unsanitary, and inadequate conditions" problem for the city. Its physical hardships include hazardous environmental contaminants, illegal dumping, scattered debris, heavy overgrowth, and most importantly, lack of sustainable development opportunity, critical for the area's future economic growth.

After careful review, the United States Environmental Protection Agency designated Frankford Creek "biologically impaired." This designation reflects the negative environmental impacts resulting from the various industrial uses surrounding the creek. Despite these impediments, however, the Philadelphia Water Department asserts that the Frankford Creek is



*Frankford Creek*

primed for restoration.

In support of the restoration effort, various residents, community groups, environmental groups, city, state, and federal agencies are working collaboratively to begin the creek's revitalization. Surprisingly, the creek supports a significant amount of aquatic life, despite its poor water quality. Recently, the Philadelphia Water Department conducted stream assessments and identified numerous fish species that live in the creek.

Clearly, improving the land-water relationship and minimizing negative impacts on the aquatic ecosystem, will further benefit these aquatic species and enable other less pollution-tolerant species to thrive. Indeed, the creek restoration could be the first step in maximizing development potential.



*Conceptual greening of- and connections to Frankford Creek*

In addition to the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's collaboration with the Philadelphia Water Department, preliminary discussions have begun with the Fairmount Park Commission about future visions for the Frankford Creek area. At this time, proposed recreational development is conceptual and the Fairmount Park Commission is under no immediate obligation to finance and implement specific recommendations.

**REDEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES**

The general goal of this Redevelopment Area Plan is to provide a framework for present and future redevelopment proposals. Clear planning policies for land use, zoning and capital program investment will not only guide the orderly growth and development of the area, but will also serve a road map for interested developers.

The plan sets out to achieve the following objec-

tives:

- To encourage new residential construction, as well as the rehabilitation of vacant homes around the creek, and adaptive reuse of large, industrial, historic structures
- To recognize the area around the Frankford Creek as an important natural community asset, thereby creating a safe and well landscaped public right of way that is regionally connected to other greenbelt areas, local parks and open spaces
- To remediate the environmental contamination and pollution of the Frankford Creek
- To eliminate the blighting influence of undesirable land uses by encouraging the redevelopment of vacant or underutilized properties
- To replace substandard, or economically obsolete buildings, with open space, and
- To preserve the historic character of the creek and community.

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission certified the subject properties as blighted on November 19, 2002. Designation for redevelopment is warranted by the following criteria having been satisfied:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Inadequate planning
3. Faulty Street and Lot layout
4. Economically or socially undesirable land use

**Summary of Blight Study**

The study area is comprised of 78 acres, 21% of which are vacant. Additionally, of the 395 properties in the study area, 11% of these are tax delinquent, which reflects economically undesirable land use. Several dead-end streets provide evidence of faulty street layout, along with other narrow, sub-standard streets. These conditions have a decidedly deteriorating effect on the neighborhood.

**EXISTING LAND USE**

As shown on the right, the land around the creek reflects a mix between industrial and residential land use. Playgrounds and a golf course are also important features of the land use pattern bordering the study area. Connections between these open spaces or nearby playgrounds and golf course should be made.

**The Juniata Park Side of the Study Area**

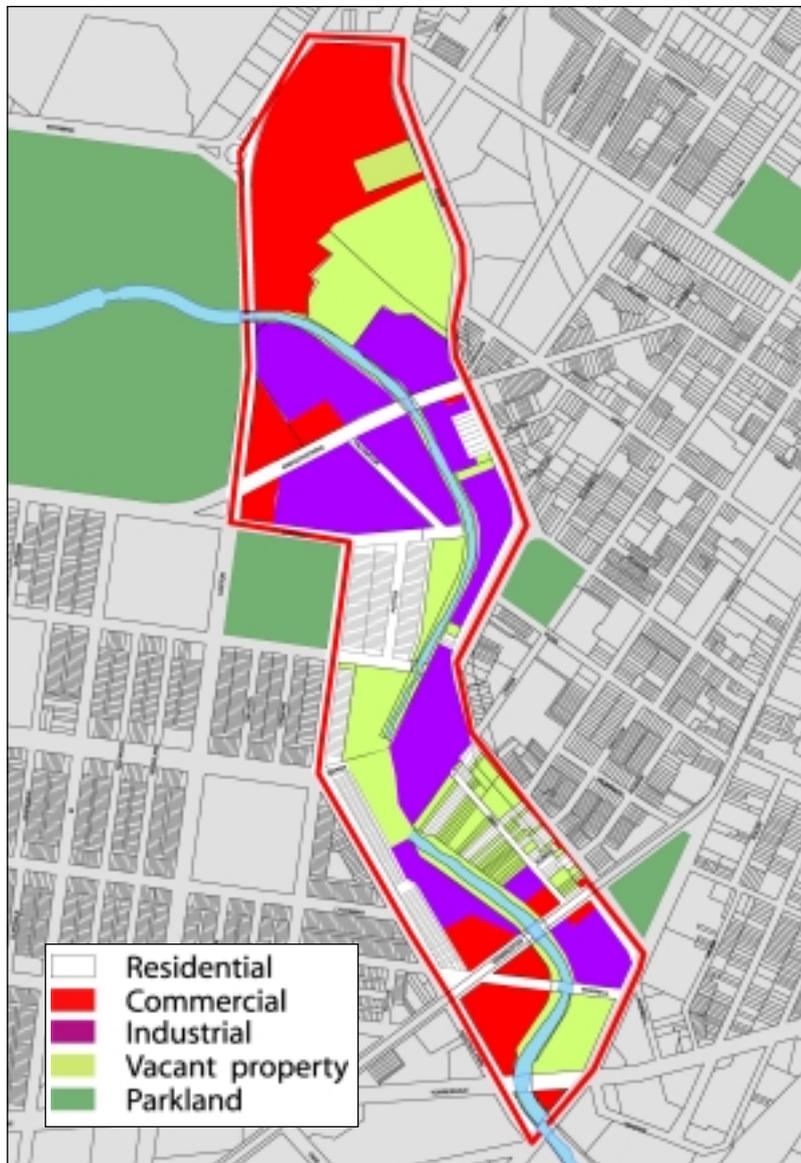
Just south of Orthodox Street, on Castor, there is a commercially zoned parcel that is home to a large vacant building (once a grocery store), next to a K-Mart. Additionally, there is another large vacant building, and two other vacant tenants, in the Juniata Shopping Center.

Between Castor Avenue, Wingohocking Street and Cayuga Street, there are several industrial uses such as a concrete-mixing plant, and auto salvage operation. All of these uses abut to the Frankford Creek. The auto related business is adjacent to Juniata Park residences.

Residential homes line the streets from Cayuga Street and "O" Street, to Hunting Park Avenue and Kensington Avenue. Here, industrial (auto-related) users exist in between the residential back yards and the Frankford Creek.

**The Frankford Side of the Study Area**

Along Kensington Avenue and Adams Avenue there are numerous auto sales lots. Off Kensington Avenue, on Deal Street, there are several small homes (few are occupied). There are also numerous vacant lots, resulting from prior residential demolitions in the area. The homes on the south side of Deal Street abut, and have access to, the Frankford Creek. However, Deal Street dead-ends at a very large, historic, and mostly vacant



*Existing Land Use*

industrial building. On Adams Avenue, just north of Kensington Avenue, numerous auto-related businesses, interspersed with small houses, dominate the landscape. Most of these properties back up to the Frankford Creek.

Adams Avenue contains the majority number of auto-related businesses. However, just north of Horrocks Street to Orthodox, on Adams, there is a large tract of land that is undeveloped (approximately 9 acres).

## PROPOSED LAND USE

As shown on the right, the "Proposed Land Use" map has been prepared to lay the groundwork for appropriate treatment following removal of blight.

The Frankford Creek Redevelopment Area Plan envisions significantly more recreational uses and landscaping alongside the waterway. It is for the benefit of the entire community that the creek must occupy a green and fully landscaped public space that is functional, well planned, and well connected to other major features in the area. This concept resembles other high-value Philadelphian areas, such as the Wissahickon Creek and Pennypack Creek Parks.

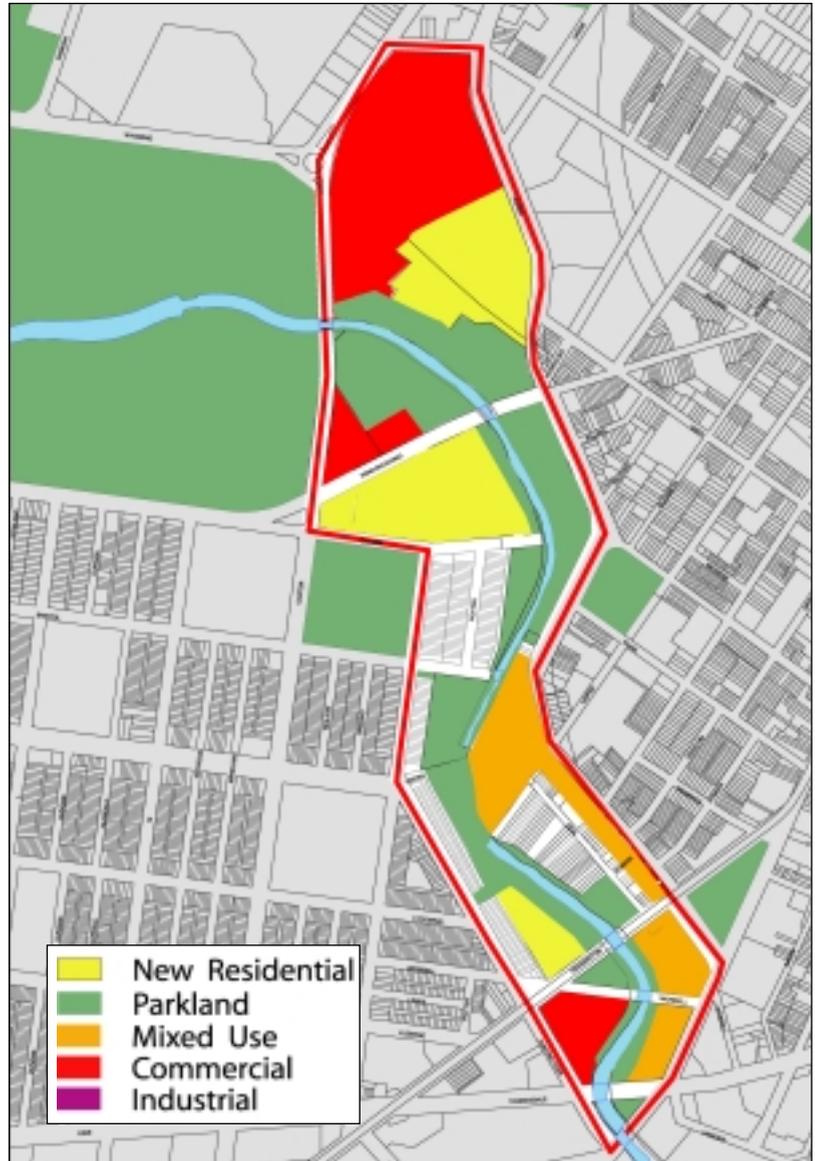
The Plan also encourages new housing construction, historic preservation, housing rehabilitation, and mixed-use development in certain areas.

Specifically, on the Juniata Park Side of the creek between Wingohocking Street, Castor Avenue, Cayuga Street and the Frankford Creek, The Philadelphia City Planning Commission anticipates that the Frankford CDC will acquire and develop approximately 54 townhouses, including a landscaped edge for public access alongside the Frankford Creek. This public access is a part of a larger, conceptual plan that calls for connected and comprehensive jogging and bike paths alongside the creek.

## EXISTING ZONING

### Context

In the late 19th century, Frankford experienced significant industrial development. During this time, Frankford was the one of the epicenters of industry in Philadelphia. Many of the factories

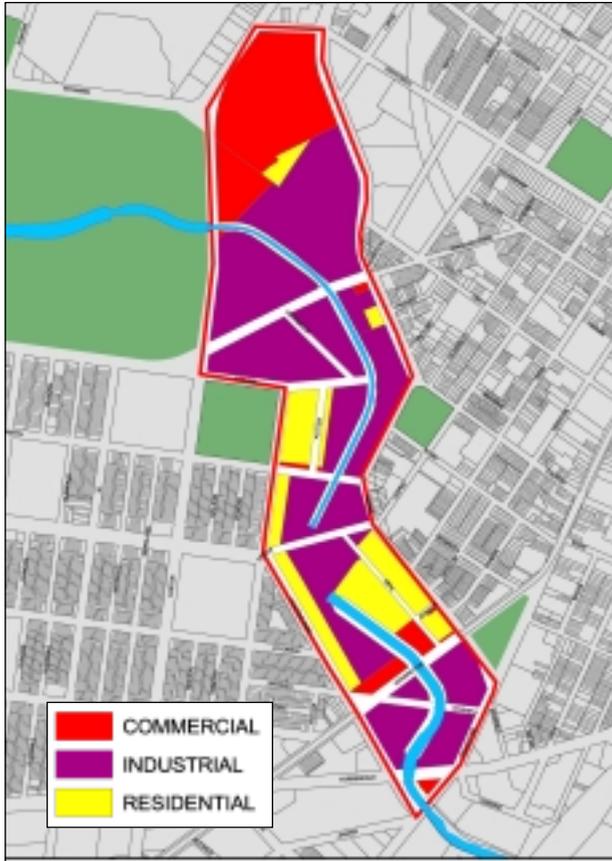


*Proposed Land Use*

desired to be located near the creek for purposes of waste disposal and for the power generation and cooling the water offered.

However, today the area hosts several auto-related businesses within the former manufacturing sites. Many of the large industrial buildings are not fully utilized and the creek is a hidden asset that lies dormant behind several of these large, mostly vacant, or underutilized properties.

Consequently, the existing zoning within the Frankford Creek Redevelopment area reflects a high concentration of G2 industrial zoning.



*Existing Zoning*

There are also areas of zoning for commercial on the edges of the study area. Residential zoning is minimal, but adjacent to the industrially zoned pieces of property.

There is no recreational zoning around the creek, as shown on the "Existing Zoning Map" above. The Philadelphia Planning Commission's proposal for new recreational open space reflects the city's appreciation for, and desire to work within, the existing framework of the natural environment. The Plan seeks to achieve safe and useable open space, while maximizing the benefit of view corridors or vistas onto, around, and from adjacent properties, buildings, and roadways.

**PROPOSED ZONING**

This area underwent a zoning remapping in 1982. Most of the zoning changes involved the changing of the R-9 and R-10 designations to R-9A and R-10A, reflecting the single-family nature of the community. Furthermore, some of the areas designated G-2 were changed to a L-4 Limited Industrial designation.

The site of "The Townhouses at Frankford Creek," bordered by Frankford Creek, Wingohocking Street, and Cayuga Street, is recommended for "residential" zoning. Future parkland along the creek is proposed for rezoning to "recreational." Specific rezoning strategies involving councilmanic ordinances or variances from the Zoning Board of Adjustment will await final development plans and/or land acquisitions to facilitate new housing or parkland.

**ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN**

Comprised of approximately 78 acres, the Frankford Creek Redevelopment Area is a fairly large-scale redevelopment plan. Large-scale planning such as this often requires a comprehensive and carefully planned approach. Planning for such radical change also requires a long-term strategy.

The Illustrative Site Plan below is a conceptual plan, which proposes new housing at three different locations. Along the creek, the plan also proposes contiguous open spaces that could incor-



*Illustrative Site Plan*

porate a multi-use trail system. This new recreational area and trail system could contribute a new and attractive feature to the City of Philadelphia, similar to other continuous parks along the Pennypack and Wissahickon. The open spaces should be maintained with assistance from community based organizations and caretakers.

Implicit in the illustrative site plan is the general goal of housing rehabilitation and historic preservation. Frankford has a rich history in terms of housing, industry, and transportation. The community has recognized that early Native American settlements were located near the Frankford Creek. There are many existing homes and structures that hold the possibility for preservation, such as the residence at 1548 Adams Avenue (ca. 1800). Any new housing should be designed in a way that is respectful of the area's historic and residential characteristics.

### **The Landscaping Plan**

With regard to this conceptual plan, a more detailed landscape strategy will need to be created. This plan should provide for a variety of open spaces, greenways, bike and jogging trails, waterways, small meadows-such as play areas, communal gardens, and courtyards. General open spaces should have linkages with ancillary open spaces contained in specific developments.

It is also critical to work within the floodplain and grain of the landscape, including topographical, hydrological, and ecological considerations. Therefore, the landscape plan should enrich the existing urban form by working with the topography to achieve sustainable movement systems, footpaths, public transit connections and corridors.

### **Site Improvements**

Although not specifically shown on the Illustrative Site Plan, site improvements are recommended to support the revitalization projects proposed in this plan. This will involve improvements to the streetscape, including new sidewalks, street trees, landscaping, and lighting. Care should be taken to ensure that these site improvements are in keeping with the architectural and historic character of the area. Finally, site planning should be a collaborative effort and with community leaders, developers, elected officials, and

other city, state, and federal agencies.

### **PROPOSED STREET CHANGES**

It is anticipated that some changes will be made to existing streets. Final plans will be prepared in conjunction with specific development plans.

### **RELOCATION**

No residential relocation is anticipated at this time. In the event relocations are necessary, all relocation will be accomplished in accordance with the terms and conditions of the federal Uniform Relocation Act.

### **ESTIMATED COSTS OF REDEVELOPMENT**

The total cost of the Townhouses at Frankford Creek is estimated at \$10,190,000. Additional costs will be determined at a later time in consultation with the City's Redevelopment Authority.

### **PROPOSED STANDARDS AND CONTROLS**

The Philadelphia Zoning Code establishes standards and controls for uses, density, land coverage, building area, parking and off-street loading. All impacts of redevelopment on the surrounding residential community will be minimized through development controls regulating site design, building materials and landscaping. These controls will be established by the Redevelopment Authority, and reviewed and approved by the City Planning Commission.

The Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945, as amended, and the United States Housing Act of 1949, as amended, regulate Redevelopment and Urban Renewal in the City of Philadelphia.

Redevelopment in the Frankford Creek Redevelopment Area will be in conformity with the provisions of this Redevelopment Area Plan and with the requirements of any Urban Renewal Plan prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia for this area, and will comply with the Code of General Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia. All plans and proposals prepared by the Redevelopment Authority will be subject to the recommendations of the City Planning Commission and the approval of the Council of the City of Philadelphia.