INTRODUCTION

The role and the nature of zoning as a regulatory tool continues to evolve. Citizens, elected and city government officials, as well as developers have begun to give increased consideration to a neighborhood’s physical development because of environmental concerns, interest in historic preservation, the increasing complexity and magnitude of development proposals, and renewed emphasis on urban design that create pedestrian-scale urban landscapes. Neighborhood groups have also evolved, becoming more knowledgeable and involved in the development process. As civic organizations look at their neighborhoods and evaluate their individual needs, a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (/NCO), can help guide changes and new development in their communities.

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

- Created by City Council in 2004 for residential areas only; 2012 code changes allow for other land use categories
- Recognizes that a particular neighborhood has integrity of form and streetscape that warrant conservation
- Regulates significant work to a building façade (that is visible from a public right-of-way), replacement of existing buildings, and construction of new structures
  - Does not regulate interiors or use
  - Does not stop demolitions
- Maintains the public streetscape and building form (i.e. setbacks, cornice lines, landscape features) and visual qualities/characteristics of the district

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Neighbors or a community group initiates the process and must provide proof of interest by the affected residents (either minutes from their public meeting or signatures from 30% of the affected property owners)
2. Nominating party submits to a background survey of the proposed /NCO which includes an existing conditions study for each block with photographs, maps or diagrams, and written descriptions of the attributes of the neighborhood
3. Process includes the creation of community-based design guidelines for the proposed district
   - Guidelines address such items such as materials, setbacks, massing
   - Guidelines are written by the community in conjunction with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC)
4. Once guidelines and boundaries of a district are set, City Council introduces legislation and votes to create the district
5. Any work to properties within the district must receive Certificate of Compliance from the PCPC before building permit can be issued
6. In its reviews of permit applications, the PCPC uses the guidelines approved for that particular district

REQUIREMENTS

- Cannot overlap with an existing or proposed municipal historic district
- Maximum size is 25 blocks
- Minimum size is 2 blocks by 2 blocks
- 70% of land must be residentially zoned and contain a residential use
- No more than 20% of the land may contain vacant lots
- Must possess a consistent architectural character as a result of a concentration of residential buildings of similar character or a continuity established by an overall plan