

EL USO CREATIVO DEL ESPACIO PÚBLICO

CREATIVE USAGE OF PUBLIC SPACES

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Resumen

La arquitectura de Filadelfia, una ciudad histórica, ha pasado por varias transformaciones en los últimos años. Al mismo tiempo ha habido muchos cambios en el sistema educativo. Empezando en 1997, la primera escuela concertada se abrió en Filadelfia. Aunque esto alivió las preocupaciones de muchas familias sobre el sistema público, también causó que se cerraran muchas escuelas públicas porque no tenían bastantes alumnos para ser viables. Numerosos edificios se quedaron vacíos y eran un peligro en el barrio. También tener que mantener estos edificios mínimamente fue un gasto tremendo para el Distrito Escolar de Filadelfia y los ciudadanos.

Para 2015, el Distrito Escolar de Filadelfia había vendido algunas de estas escuelas para disminuir su crisis presupuestaria. Aunque unos pocos edificios fueron derrumbados, para mediados de 2017, cinco de ellos habían sido convertidos en pisos o condominios; uno fue dedicado a pisos para veteranos indigentes.

Los vecinos, y la ciudad en general, están agradecidos por esta restauración porque evite el problema de los ocupa, drogadictas y ratas. Estos edificios son un símbolo de orgullo y utilidad porque también son una solución a la falta de pisos en la ciudad.

Estos edificios se unen a más de veinte otras construcciones de mediados del siglo XIX a principios del siglo XX que han sido restaurados y que formarán parte del renacimiento de la ciudad. Esta ciudad podría ser un modelo para otras localidades.



Abstract

Philadelphia, a historical city, has undergone many changes in the architecture of the city. At the same time there have been many developments in its educational system. Beginning in 1997, the first charter schools opened in Philadelphia. Although this alleviated concerns for many parents about the underachieving public school system, it meant that many schools had to close since they no longer had enough students to keep them viable. Numerous schools were standing empty and becoming a hazard to their neighborhood. Additionally, the cost of maintaining these empty buildings was a hardship both for the School District of Philadelphia and the city taxpayers.

By 2015 the School District of Philadelphia had sold a number of these schools to lessen its budgetary crisis. Although a few of the schools were demolished, by the summer of 2017, five of these schools had been converted into apartments or condominiums; one of them was even dedicated to apartments for homeless veterans. Overall these renovations have been welcomed by the neighbors and the city as a whole. Instead of being overtaken by squatters, drug addicts or rats, these buildings are now a source of pride and practicality since they have helped with the ever growing housing market in the city.

These buildings will join more than twenty mid19th through early 20th century structures which have become part of the city's renaissance The redevelopment of this city could be a model for other areas.



Introduction

My presentation, Creative Usage of Public Spaces at the Ciudades Creativas Conference will look at how changes in the Philadelphia school system led to the closing of 28 schools and allowed developers in Philadelphia to begin converting abandoned buildings (many listed in the National Register of Historic Places) into apartments or public spaces instead of demolishing them, something that has been done in many US cities. Since many of these structures are located in blighted areas of the city, this will support the revitalization of these neighborhoods, however, it could also create gentrification.

Objectives

This presentation will examine how the transformations in a failing school system led to the closing of schools which left abandoned buildings throughout Philadelphia, especially in the poorer, non-white neighborhoods. It will highlight how developers have taken the opportunity to convert these deserted structures from dangerous and unsightly eyesores into positive space that offer affordable housing, community areas and workspaces. Understanding the influence of Philadelphia's public school system on its citizens, the changing demographics and some innovative ideas for development are an essential component. It is crucial to recognize Philadelphia's historical significance in the architectural development of the United States.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was the main focus of the research. Observation and visual analysis were used. I also spoke to a number of people who either live in an apartment that is housed within a former school or live or work in areas that have been greatly affected by the closing of public schools, the growth of charter schools, those from the Renaissance Initiative in particular, or by the redevelopment of schools into creative public spaces. Textual analysis (in the form of newspaper articles, newscasts and websites) was added. Quantitative data in the form of statistics, graphs, maps and census findings was inserted to round out the information and to create a visual understanding of Philadelphia and its particular standing compared to other cities. This was necessary in order to compare the housing market in Philadelphia over the last few years, to locate those areas that have been the most affected by the closings, as well as the renaissance, and to ascertain how many buildings have been demolished and how many have been converted into living or community spaces. It also demonstrates the need for continuing to rehab abandoned structures to generate more affordable housing and public spaces in the most neglected neighborhoods of the city.

1. Background

Pennsylvania is a state that has a complex educational system which includes regular schools, (consisting of public, parochial, independent and private) charter schools, cyber charter schools and full-time career and technical education centers. Philadelphia has confronted a series of significant issues from an educational perspective. For the better part of the 20th century Philadelphia was a city which had neighborhoods split by racial and ethnic lines. This meant that the public schools were racially divided since they were neighborhood



schools until 1970. Unfortunately the level of education that was offered favored the wealthier, less diverse neighborhoods and the poverty-stricken areas of the city were left with schools whose quality was below par. The more experienced and better teachers chose to teach in the schools without discipline problems, where the parents took a more active part in the education of their children, with more resources and in the safer parts of the city.

In 1970, the School District of Philadelphia instituted a “voluntary busing” (school choice) program to alleviate both the matter of desegregation and the problem of low performing schools in some of the poorest areas of the city. Parents could choose to send their children to a higher achieving school outside of their locality, as long as there was space and, if there was a racial imbalance in the school, there was more of a push to accept diverse students. School choice (or voluntary busing) proved unsuccessful overall.

Another initiative to integrate schools was the creation of magnet schools (public schools that offer special instruction and programs not available elsewhere and which draw students from the whole city as opposed to from a specific neighborhood/area). These highly selective programs were not only the best public schools in Philadelphia but they could compete with some of the best private and independent schools, both in the city and throughout the state. They were also seen as a defense against the attraction of suburban public schools. The innovative curricula fostered the development of the student in all areas. The graduates were accepted to some of the most competitive colleges and universities in the country.

On the whole, however, the majority of Philadelphia’s public schools performed below the national average.

just 14 percent of Philadelphia fourth-graders were proficient or better at reading, compared to 26 percent in other big cities and 34 percent nationally. Of the 25 largest U.S. cities, Philadelphia ranks 22nd in college degree attainment. Graduates of the School District of Philadelphia are particularly bad off; only about 10 percent of district alums go on to get degrees.¹

Since the School Board of Philadelphia was considered incapable of improving the situation, in 1997, the Pennsylvania Board of Education voted to allow local boards to establish charter schools. In 2001 the school district of Philadelphia was taken over by the state. Even these changes, however, couldn’t stem the flight of families, especially middle class non-Hispanic white families, from the majority of the public schools. The more advanced students enrolled in the magnet schools. Others attended independent, private schools or religious schools. However,

At 45 percent of the total number of households moving out, families with children under 18 make up the largest single group of out-migrants. By contrast, only 28 percent of households moving into the city had children under 18. Households with children under 18 account for 48 percent of all households citywide.²



This “white flight” as it’s been called, has been strongly motivated by the search for outstanding public schools. Many families are willing to pay higher property taxes in order to be able to send their children to better performing suburban public schools that will prepare them well for college. However, with the opening of charter schools in 1997, parents who stayed in Philadelphia had a choice of sending their youngsters to schools whose academic programs were designed to stress a variety of areas and to be more innovative. Although the curriculum did not have to follow the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s lead, the standards were supposed to be higher, with an emphasis on student achievement (according to a report by radio station WHYY in 2014, charter school pupils scored 10 points higher than those from public schools on standardized test, although the average was still an appalling 64 out of 100). Each charter school was mandated to be evaluated every five years.

In 2003, Philadelphia underwent a far-reaching educational reform effort. It was more extensive than that of other school districts.

from 1994-2000. Children Achieving consisted of an ambitious "systemic reform" plan for Philadelphia, including: the development of standards for teaching and learning; decentralized decision making and the division of the district into 22 clusters; the development of small learning communities within schools; the implementation of district-wide high stakes testing; and a commitment to seek adequate funding for the District.³

In 2010, this reorganization went even further when the School District of Philadelphia announced a Plan titled the Renaissance Initiative which was a direct contrast to voluntary busing. Since the population shifts within the city had created more diverse neighborhoods in a large portion of the city, desegregation was no longer seen as a priority. According to the Renaissance Initiative, although charter schools can be found throughout the city, many of them are in the poorest and lowest achieving areas. The newly formed Renaissance charter schools would target catchment zones (geographic areas within the city). In addition to being run by an experienced charter school operator, both parents and the school community members have a say in the formation and policies that govern it since there had been instances where local parents had voted whether they wanted to see their local public school become a charter or not. This development came about years after a civil rights/discrimination suit had been filed against the School District stating that public schools with a majority of non-white students received much lower funding per student. The case ceased when the School District was taken over by the state and converted into the School Reform Commission (which will be disbanded as of July, 2018.)

The majority of both the city and state politicians, as well as representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, felt that the city public schools weren’t being run as a viable business since there was a budgetary deficit year after year, in addition to students’ low scores on standardized tests.

schools, like businesses, should be responsive to market forces, and that privatization and competition will result in inferior schools losing students (and eventually closing) and good schools thriving and increasing the proportion of students they serve. Following this theory,



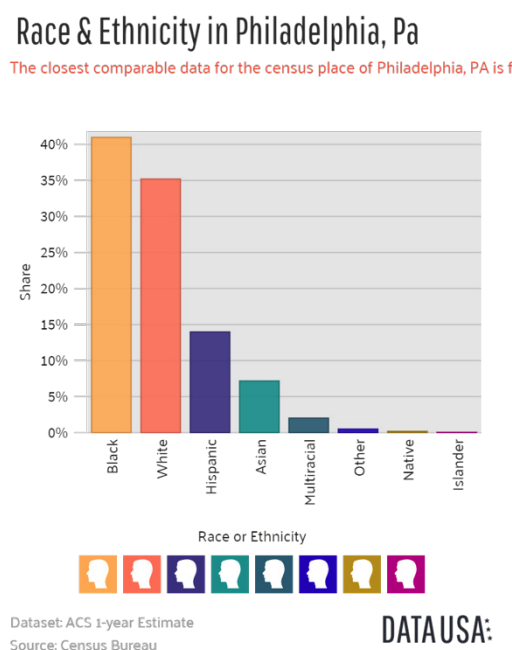
contracting out some or all of the key functions of public school systems and healthy competition between public and private schools that are funded with public dollars will result in increased productivity (i.e. academic achievement and graduation rates.). Charter schools are seen as the first step in breaking the stranglehold of the public system. ⁴

2. Demographics

Philadelphia has had its share of problems in attracting young inhabitants, both single and withnotwithstanding its historical value and geographical location halfway between New York and Washington, DC. The 115 colleges and universities in the Philadelphia metropolitan area are a major draw for students, both nationally and internationally. Sadly many of them do not stay after graduation, causing a “brain drain”. Attracting and keeping a vibrant, educated population, especially those interested in working as qualified teachers in the public school system, could make the difference between developing an exciting curriculum that would foster a successful student body instead of a lackluster one that leads to a high drop-out rate. This would also prevent the further closing of public schools and break the cycle of vacant buildings needing to be rehabilitated.

According to the US Census, between 2012 - 2016, only 26.3% of the population had a Bachelors’ degree or higher and the median household income was only \$39,770.00 ⁶ (DataUSA stated it was \$41,233.00 in 2017 with a poverty rate of 25.8%). Of the 1,570,000 people in the city, 41% are African American or African, 35% are white and 63,801 are veterans. ⁵

Figure 1 Race and Ethnicity in Philadelphia 2015

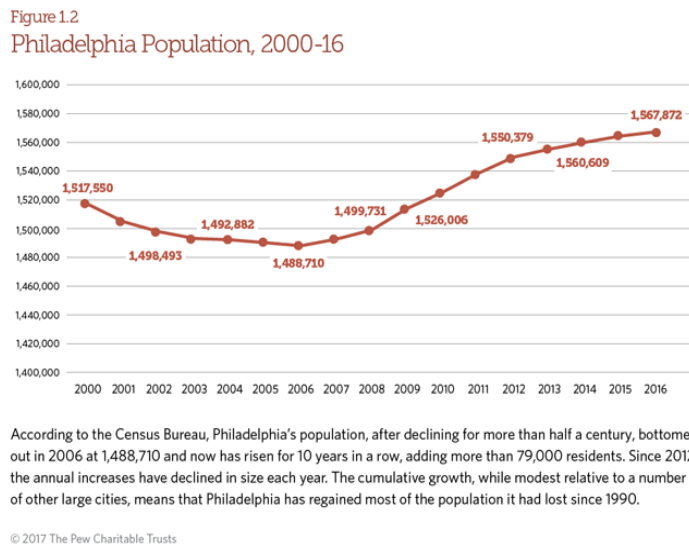


Source Census Bureau 6



The population of Philadelphia has grown over the last few years. 25% of it is comprised of children and adolescents up to the age of 18. 65,000 of them are enrolled in the 86 citywide charter schools, 131,000 are in the 214 public schools, 13,000 in independent private and religious schools, 7000 in the state's cyber schools and those who are home schooled.

Figure 2 Philadelphia's Population 2006 - 16



Source 2017 The Pew Charitable Trust ⁷

3. Effects on the Neighborhoods

Although the population had decreased between 2000 and 2008, 62 charter schools opened. This was followed by another 35 between 2008 and 2016. Since the opening of Philadelphia's charter schools, the public school system has lost over 60,000 students, even though the school age population has not decreased significantly. Since 2008, 28 public schools have closed their doors (about 10% of the overall city public schools). Most of the closed schools were located in the neediest neighborhoods of the city. Although many parents saw the charter schools as a better alternative to the low quality, and often dangerous, public schools, there have also been serious concerns leading to their closing because it often left students without any options. The previously mentioned Renaissance Initiative has been trying to combat this problem but, due to the parental involvement and higher standards of these schools, the seats fill up quickly and many students are waitlisted while continuing to attend inferior public schools or other charter schools. Since the Renaissance schools are restricted to students living in specific catchment zones, they can only apply if they live in the twenty one areas that are served by them (and there are only three Renaissance high schools).

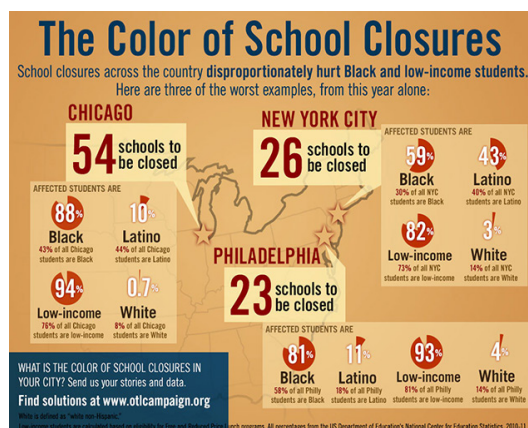
School districts across America depend on federal, state and local funding to function. According to the Education Law Center's School Funding Report, Pennsylvania school districts receive an average of 35.8 percent of funds from the state, compared with a nationwide average of 43.5 percent, making Pennsylvania one of the ten lowest contributors of state education funding in the nation. This has forced Pennsylvania's school districts to rely on local property taxes to make up



the difference, leaving the poorest districts, like Philadelphia, at a severe disadvantage. ⁸

Due to the fact that over a quarter of the population lives in poverty, or deep poverty, and does not pay taxes, this has left the Philadelphia School District with a deficit for many years. Since the white, middle and upper class districts pay the majority of the city’s taxes, these schools have not been affected by closures overall.

Figure 3 School Closures by Race



Source US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics 2010- 11 ⁹

The high crime rate and unsafe conditions in the areas housing many of the city’s empty buildings meant that there was a lack of interest in purchasing these properties. Countless structures stood vacant for a number of years. The residents in these neighborhoods expressed concern to both city officials and local representatives about the danger that could be found in the abandoned structures. They were a haven for drug addicts, drug dealers, squatters and vermin. These added to the bank foreclosed homes, sometimes as many as ten on one street. Hard-working, honest people who turned to the police were often left frustrated or ignored. Nothing was being done. Areas of the city looked like war zones filled with trash where demolished buildings had once stood (part of the “lost architecture”) or where deserted ones could be seen with their broken windows and graffiti filled walls. Various developers who expressed an interest in purchasing the schools were sometimes disheartened by the burdensome process presented to them by the District, and the city’s Department of Licenses and Inspections.

In the past, the few once thriving factories, former banks or now empty churches or schools that were fortunate enough to be purchased were often torn down to make room for the ever expanding colleges and universities. Some of these acquisitions were renovated while keeping the façade intact. Although this was a preferable situation to leaving the empty structures a target of the outcasts of society, most of the population was searching for a better solution, for something that would benefit the communities where they lived. With the university takeover of a property gentrification began. The streets would become safer but, at the same time, housing prices, property taxes and apartment rentals would rise sharply in a short period of time. The houses that went up for sale would often be bought by university employees who received cash incentives for down payments from their employers. Locals could no longer afford to live in areas where they had spent their whole life. One problem was solved while another was created.



In one instance, University City High School, and the land that surrounded it, was bought by Drexel University and Wexford Science and Technology. There had previously been hard feelings towards Drexel University, and other universities and hospitals, because numerous properties had been taken from the historically black residents under the program of eminent domain. Even though the sale was presented as a way to bring jobs to the neighborhood, there was resistance to the sale because

Since 2000, the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative has operated a community garden on the grounds of University City High. Staffed primarily by local high school students, the garden remained open even after the high school shut its doors. The garden produces one to two tons of food per year...Ten percent of the food grown in the garden is donated to support local populations. A quarter is sold to low-income community members using EBT or SNAP. The remaining food is sold...at the bustling Clark Park Farmers' Market. With the sale to Drexel and the rezoning of the property, the future of the garden is in jeopardy. ¹⁰

On the other hand, Andrew Frishkoff, executive director of the non-profit Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corp. (LISC) sees this as an opportunity for growth for the community that can serve as a bond for members on both sides. ¹¹

Frishkoff seems to be right. The newly named uCity Square, while still under construction, has plans for 10 buildings that will house life science and technology companies, retail stores, bike sharing (a favorite for the many students at the various universities in the area) and parking (which is at a premium in that part of the city). It's being touted as a center for job creation and innovation. Although the majority of the consumers taking advantage of these resources may be either the students or faculty from the surrounding Drexel University, University of Pennsylvania, University of the Sciences or the Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College or recently arrived residents to this area, many of the workers will/should come from the surrounding neighborhoods. They could receive on the job training which would allow them to overcome some of the challenges that they face due to the lack of a rigorous curriculum in their former schools. Only time will tell.

3. Housing Issues and Solutions

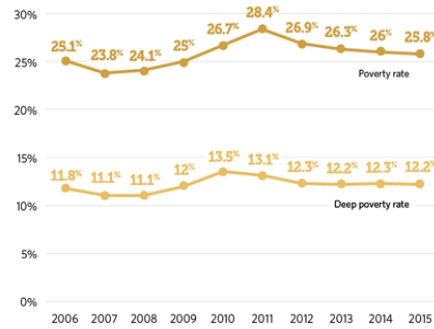
According to the Pew Trust, although household incomes in Philadelphia rose 5% in 2016, the home prices have risen 38% since 2010, with a median price of \$147,300 in 2016, while the median household income was only \$39,770. To make matters worse, the Philadelphia's poverty level is the highest in the US top ten cities (at 25.8%) ¹²



Figure 4 - Poverty and Deep Poverty in Philadelphia 2006 - 15

Figure 8.1

Poverty and Deep Poverty in Philadelphia, 2006-15



For the last decade, Philadelphia has had the highest poverty rate of the nation's 10 largest cities, with the rate declining slowly from a peak of 28.4 percent in 2011. Throughout the period, well over 40 percent of the city's poor have been living in "deep poverty," meaning their incomes were no more than half of the federal poverty limit. In 2016, a family of four was living in poverty if its income was \$24,300 or less, in deep poverty at \$12,150 or less.

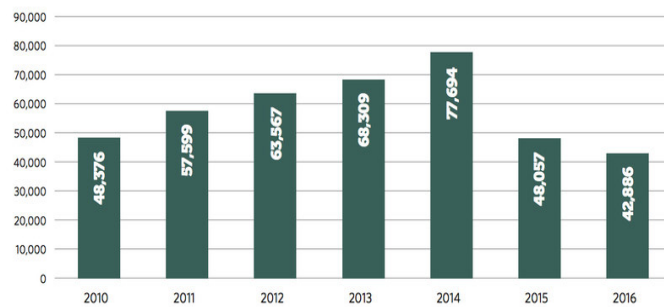
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Source 2017 The Pew Charitable Trust 13

As seen in the previous graph from The Pew Trust, the families who live in poverty (with an income of \$24,300. for a family of four) or in deep poverty (with an income of \$12,150. or less) wouldn't be able to purchase a home nor rent an apartment at the current prices. They're dependent on either living with other family members or having to move into apartments that are operated by the Philadelphia Housing Authority.

Figure 5 - Philadelphia Housing Authority Waiting List 2010-16

Philadelphia Housing Authority Waiting List, 2010-16



Source © 2017 The Pew Charitable Trusts 14

This chart shows that there's still a great need for affordable housing in Philly, although the researchers note that the waiting list has decreased "sharply." Still, that's mostly because the Philadelphia Housing Authority removed people from the list that they couldn't get in touch with... It's also worth noting that Philly has lost 20 percent of its affordable housing stock between 2000 and 2014. ¹⁵

Affordable housing in Philadelphia is in high demand. Most research on the cost of living in Philadelphia has found that, on average, 30% of a monthly paycheck is spent on housing. This means that a large portion of adults have problems supporting themselves (or a family). In order to improve this situation, some local leaders began petitioning developers to buy abandoned properties, such as the former schools, in order to convert them into apartments that would be affordable for the local residents, to build community spaces,



stores and restaurants.

Many of these shuttered schools were built in the early 20th century. Their immense size was ideal for the vast amounts of children and adolescents who attended them. However, as families withdrew their offspring from the public schools, many started using half, or less, of the building. The size, which was too large for the diminishing school population, is perfect for redevelopment into apartments.

On the other hand, just as in the case of University City High School, Walter Smith Elementary School, the multiracial community of Point Breeze did not want their school to be converted into apartments or retail space because they were combatting the gentrification that's in evidence in some neighborhoods. They organized protests and involved the media and various activists in trying to have their school reopened, either as a public school or, in the worst case scenario, as a charter school. Their efforts seemed successful when Concordia Group, a developer, gave up their plans to reconstruct the school due to the disgruntlement of the locals. However, they quickly sold it to another developer who began transforming the school into 105 apartments. Prices haven't yet been published but Concordia had originally promised that there would be low-income housing available as well as community space and an educational center. However, some members of the community fear that the local people will not be able to afford apartments in this former school since the present developer, Feibush, has refused to make any commitment to low-cost apartments. Now the neighbors feel that attempts to save the school, and to fight urban renewal, have failed.

The public has seen this same situation in the former West Philadelphia High School (listed in the National Register of Historic Places) which has now become West Lofts, luxury apartments that have been almost fully rented. (<http://www.westlofts.com/>). Although it's close proximity to both the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University makes it an ideal location for students and faculty, it has been widely touted. That many of the present inhabitants have an affiliation with the former high school. Some were students there, or have had family members who attended the school. Even the developer/ owner has ties to the school. This influenced his decision to keep the former gym as the fitness center and to incorporate many of the original features into the apartments.

The century old grandeur of the original gothic/industrial West Philadelphia High School building is preserved in brick and steel detailing, soaring concrete ceilings and oversized windows in these luxury Philadelphia apartments near University City. The dramatic lofts restored 1911 gym with suspended running track, the brick "plenum" (truly one of the most extraordinary event spaces in Philadelphia) comprise the West Lofts' lifestyle.¹⁶

Lural Lee Blevins Veterans Center, the former Spring Garden School, has been more accepted by the surrounding community since it's a partnership between the Philadelphia Housing Authority and HELP USA, a national housing and homeless services organization. Before constructions began the building, which had been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986, was a favorite for artists practicing their creativity through graffiti. Although there had been some resistance since the majority of the 37 units would be used



by veterans, many of them homeless, HELP USA's affiliation with the Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center has alleviated some of the fears associated with the homeless, who are often on the edge of society, and homeless veterans who have a history of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center helps veterans with resources and finding medical services. The additional support and history of other successful veterans' centers in the city lessened people's worries. The remainder of the units had been reserved for people 55 and older (another segment of society that has been negatively affected by the increasing high housing costs). All of the units, which are affordable, have been rented; there are no vacancies.

This Center was named for a former student of Edison High School who later served, and was killed in Vietnam. Many people from the neighborhood feel that he should have been given the Medal of Honor since he died while heroically helping other members of his unit to safety. This way his legacy will live on.

The former Edison High School, also located in run-down North Philadelphia, is now in the process of becoming Edison 64. As part of the Philadelphia Housing Authority (again partnering with the Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service Center), it will house 66 units, 20 for homeless vets. The name, Edison 64, refers to the fact that 64 former students of the high school died in Vietnam.

Similar to the Lural Lee Blevins Veterans Center, it will contain offices to assist in the veterans' rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Edison 64 will develop into another beneficial recycled former school property. The other phase of the project will become a shopping center. The reconstruction, and new retail stores, will bring jobs to this distressed neighborhood and help rebuild this region of the city. The City of Philadelphia has been giving corporate tax credits to businesses that support local incentives in the formerly neglected sections.

Although it may seem a small gesture, these tribute to former members of the community who served their country has been an acknowledgement of an often forgotten and ignored group in society. While some had joined the Army in order to escape the crime and gangs of North Philadelphia others had been sent to Vietnam instead of to jail. However, this accolade proves that, in death, they're now honored citizens of the city as a whole. More former students of Edison High School died in Vietnam than from any other school in the United States.

While many of the problems of gangs, drugs and murders that were evident in this poverty stricken part of the city during the Vietnam-era are still seen today, there is a glimmer of hope. Students, mostly African American or Latino, look to Edison 64, and other revitalized buildings in North Philadelphia, as an inspiration to oppose the crime and violence that are a part of their daily life. Some have joined a poetry club and have participated in a citywide slam poetry competition.



Made Institute, a premier sewing school which opened in 2012, moved to an empty industrial building which used to house the Haverford Cycle Company in the Summer of 2017. The building had been empty for some time before the renovations began. Only the façade was left intact but this maintains the style of the area.

Made is an important addition to the neighborhood because it's been licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. It's possible to get a diploma in design through their one year program, to take individual classes or to use their facilities which are equipped with sewing machines, etc. in order to encourage both novices and advanced couturiers in their creative endeavors. This Institute will give people in the neighborhood the skills necessary to pursue a career in design or sewing. This is an alternative to the standard path pursued by the majority of students.

Reactions to Made Institute, and to the renovated building, have been very positive. Sales of abandoned industrial properties are often lackluster. Additionally, the classes are popular both among the young and older populations.

This has become a partial solution to a longstanding problem. Since these properties had been uninhabited for so long, developers were able to acquire them for far below market value. Instead of tearing them down (as had been so commonly done), they're keeping the exterior intact while transforming the inside. The lower sale prices and the attraction of a corporate tax break have motivated some of these companies to turn all, or part, of the buildings into low and moderate cost apartments, public housing, handicapped accessible apartments, apartments for homeless veterans, non-profit and co-working office space, day care centers and stores.

5. Conclusions

Philadelphia's failing public school system, the growth of charter schools (a trend found in 43 of the 50 states), changes in policy and mismanagement on the part of the School District have led to the closing of 28 public schools in the last ten years. Although this added to the already available former churches, Masonic halls, factories, hotels, fire stations, warehouses and banks, today less than half are still without ownership. Some have been gutted or simply redesigned and turned into high end condominiums, apartments or hotels. Two have become restaurants which will probably never be visited by the local populace due to their pricey menus.

A few have become the charter schools that forced their closing in the first place (although presently the future of many Philadelphia charter schools is uncertain). One or two have been boycotted by various organizations or community groups who oppose any project due to their anger at the closing of their local school. Some of them are still awaiting zoning permits or are under construction. Others have undergone such a drastic metamorphosis that they've caused a once blighted area to continue with the development.



Philadelphia, while still overshadowed by its close neighbor New York, has been experiencing a revival of sorts. Notwithstanding the poverty and drug epidemic that are apparent in various parts of the city, and the lack of affordable housing, the city has been working to create an atmosphere that's conducive to developers, especially those interested in rebuilding and cleaning up the less desirable districts of the city as opposed to beginning totally new construction.

In order to be successful long term, just as the Renaissance schools work in partnership with the parents, the developers should count on community participation to support the ongoing changes. Taking into consideration what the various neighborhoods need will make the transformation smoother and benefit all sides. Just as the policies enacted in the school system had to conform to the changing times, the neighborhoods will need to adapt to the transformations taking place in the newly restored former schools. Just as some of the charter schools have had to reinvent themselves in order to avoid closing, so too must the contractors if they want to gain acceptance from the community.

Although many cities in the United States have been confronted with the same situation as Philadelphia, some have been more successful in the transition from a school to a "recycled" public space. Philadelphia has been fortunate that in the last few years many of the structures were sold and at least the façade has been maintained. Demolishing the buildings has become less common than in former decades. In many instances, various aspects of the former schools have been preserved, such as the case of West Lofts keeping the original gymnasium. In many cities, the unsafe conditions in the areas of the shuttered buildings, as well as a lack of support from local governments have not made the redevelopment an attractive or viable process. Local activism has also deterred possible developers from investing in an unwelcome region. Even though some of these same issues have been evident in Philadelphia, the motivation for the District to sell has created overall favorable conditions. The rising prices in the housing market have been an added incentive.

Philadelphia has shown itself as a model for other cities in finding "creative usage for public spaces". It would be beneficial to revisit this matter in the future to gauge the results on the city.

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