



Revitalizing urban neighborhoods through innovative design.

Infill Philadelphia is an initiative of the Community Design Collaborative.
www.infillphiladelphia.org

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For more information:

Susan Prior, 215.209.3077; on site 215.605.8623

sprior@sage-communications.com

INFILL PHILADELPHIA: FOOD ACCESS TO HELP URBAN COMMUNITIES HUNGRY FOR NEW OPTIONS

Design initiative looks to fill the urban food gap, finding innovative ways to bring healthy, affordable food to the region's "food deserts"

Philadelphia, PA – May 14, 2008 – In Philadelphia, a city where a famous resident once said, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," an apple is increasingly hard to find. Ripe local produce and bright, seasonal fruit has become an inaccessible luxury in far too many urban communities where access to affordable, fresh food is limited at best. The result is a surge in obesity, diabetes and other public health issues that continue to grow more costly and troubling by the year.

In an highly collaborative effort to improve access to healthy, fresh, affordable food, the Community Design Collaborative, a nonprofit driven by the philosophy that design matters in every neighborhood, has teamed up with The Food Trust and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) to support a design challenge that will tackle some of the common issues surrounding food access in urban neighborhoods through a unique approach - innovative design.

Infill Philadelphia: Food Access will officially kick off on Thursday, May 29, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Room 109 B, from 8:30 – 10:30 a.m., when the design teams, jurors and partners will be officially announced and the project sites unveiled. The program will feature a keynote address by Dr. Kimberly Morland, an expert specializing in Community and Preventive Medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Morland will discuss the impact of better food access on low-income, urban communities and the social, health and economic factors surrounding what experts refer to as urban "food deserts" – neighborhoods with few markets and fresh food stores.

"Food Access is a pressing issue," said Yael Lehmann, Executive Director of the Food Trust. "Improving access to fresh, affordable food is essential to protecting the health and well being of children. The Food Trust and our partners view this as a unique opportunity to help elevate a significant topic that, left unchanged, will continue to diminish community health and cause economic decline."

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The Food Access design challenge is the second of a three-phase initiative called *Infill Philadelphia*. The initiative, which matches local design experts with community-based organizations for a site-specific design project, is the brainchild of the Collaborative. It is intended to demonstrate the possibilities of inventive design and help older communities re-envision the appearance of their neighborhoods while leveraging their existing physical assets in order to spark community reinvestment.

Infill Philadelphia: Food Access is being funded through the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI), an innovative and a nationally-recognized leader in the movement to improve the urban food landscape. FFFI, a public/private venture that supports the financing needs of supermarket operators that plan to operate in underserved communities where infrastructure costs and credit needs cannot be filled solely by conventional financial institutions, has put the spotlight on the issue of food access and sparked a powerful dialogue about how to tackle the significant gap in urban and low-income communities.

“The barriers to developing and operating urban supermarkets range from misperceptions regarding local buying power to the very real challenges of smaller urban spaces, zoning, workforce and security needs,” said Don Hinkle-Brown, President of Lending, The Reinvestment Fund. “While the PA Fresh Food Financing Initiative helps food entrepreneurs tackle some early financial issues, they don’t tend to have access to designers who can help them visualize how they could use non-standard space. This initiative will really help them think in a new way and take on space issues more rigorously.”

Three volunteer design firms have signed on and will tackle three projects critical to ensuring more access to fresh, affordable food in communities hungry for more options. They will closely partner with three community-based organizations to create concepts that respond to each site’s specific requirements, which range considerably in scale and retail format. The projects include retrofitting a corner grocery as a neighborhood food co-op, transforming a vacant warehouse into a large food co-op and retail anchor for a re-born business district, and developing a supermarket on a challenging urban infill site. To ensure the teams deliver realizable solutions, a jury of experts with diverse experiences and perspectives will review the projects.

“All the Food Access partners recognize improving access to fresh food is a highly complicated issue that requires a collaborative approach,” said Elizabeth Miller, Executive Director, Community Design Collaborative. “Our goal is to support local efforts to bring fresh food outlets into underserved communities. We view design as a critical part of the solution.”

Community Design Collaborative of AIA Philadelphia is a volunteer-based community design center that provides pro bono preliminary design services to nonprofit organizations; promotes best practices in community design and development; and offers design professionals a unique way to volunteer their skills in service of neighborhoods. Founded in 1991 as a program of AIA Philadelphia, the Collaborative is an independent 501(c)(3) with a network of more than 600 volunteers. www.cdesignc.org