

INTO THE OPEN

Repurpose! is a one-day community workshop with architects and members of the Mantua neighborhood in West Philadelphia. On Saturday, August 22 2009, beginning at 10:00 a.m., participants will engage in community workshops about ongoing neighborhood civic initiatives aimed at revitalizing West Philadelphia.

The workshop will take place on a vacant lot at 611-627 N. 40th Street, soon to be the site of new affordable housing units. The day will begin at 10am with a community workshop titled “What is affordable housing?” led by Rosten Woo of the Center for Urban Pedagogy. Presentations will be made at 12pm by Councilwoman Blackwell and Gloria Guard, President of the People’s Emergency Center. Following their remarks, architects Dave Beuge, Lindsay Bremner, and Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss will lead workshops resulting in the creation of temporary structures such as an outdoor movie theater and shelter made from repurposed plastic bottles. The day will culminate with videos from the Precious Places Community History Project, a community oral history initiative produced by Scribe Video Center, beginning at 8pm in the movie theater.

Repurpose!
Saturday, August 22 2009
10am-10pm

For more information:
intotheopen.org

The National Constitution Center, in partnership with the Slought Foundation, the Community Design Collaborative, and the People’s Emergency Center, present Repurpose!

The workshop is organized with support from the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, and the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Sustainability.

Videos courtesy of Scribe Video Center. The plastic bottles used in the workshops are courtesy of Blue Mountain Recycling.



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The vacant lot on 611-627 North 40th St in Mantua, near the intersection of 40th and Lancaster Ave, will serve as the site for the Repurpose! community workshops on August 22nd, 2009. The number of such abandoned lots in Philadelphia is estimated to exceed 30,000, while the number of abandoned houses exceeds 50,000. These lots and houses are potential sites for redevelopment work and urban revitalization initiatives.

The lot is located in a section of West Philadelphia which is represented by the People's Emergency Center Community Development Corporation (PECCDC). The work of the PECCDC focuses in particular on the neighborhoods of West Powelton, Saunders Park, Belmont, and Mantua, which experience poverty rates above and below the city's average of 19%, and unemployment above the city's average of nearly 10%.

These neighborhoods are of historical importance as Lancaster Avenue was the first turnpike in America. Developed in the late 1700's to link the growing urban fabric of Philadelphia with the rural farmland of Lancaster County that fed it, the Lancaster Philadelphia Turnpike swiftly populated and was itself developed as a community. As businesses and institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania and its Presbyterian Medical Center moved in and expanded, these neighborhoods took further shape, and the community thrived as a commercial district. Its decline in the 1960's due to gang and drug related activity, however, still resonates today.

During the 1960's Mantua was one of the worst areas of the 16th precinct, and was responsible for 10% of the total city's gang killings. In the 1990's, the neighborhood witnessed a nearby influx of students from Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania, however this move still did not address the underlying crime, poverty, and other problems faced by the neighborhood. Today, with organizations like Mantua Cares, community residents are involved in efforts to alleviate these problems.

The PECCDC works with community residents and local authorities such as the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) to improve the social and economic wealth of this area. By redeveloping vacant lots and abandoned buildings as parks, gardens, businesses, and affordable housing, they provide new spaces of social activation and engagement for the neighborhood, and in the neighborhood's own terms: on their land, with their help, according to their needs. The CDC incorporates the community in the redevelopment process in order to achieve its goal of transforming West Philadelphia into a "Community of Choice" -- one where people choose to live and work.

The lot is currently slated to become "Jannie's Place," the site of new affordable housing units named after Philadelphia Councilwoman Jannie L. Blackwell.

It was previously a gas station. Heavy Industrial zoned sites such as this one represents the most challenging conditions for cleaning and rehabilitation, due to the high amounts of chemical seepage into the ground.

A crowd of 10,000 people gathered nearby here in 1965 to hear Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. hail the growing Civil Rights movements across the country. This event is revisited in a Scribe Video Center community production, which will be screened during Repurpose! on the evening of August 22.