



Committee of Seventy

Clean and effective government. Fair elections. Informed citizens.

14 September 2011

The Honorable Anna C. Verna
President, Philadelphia City Council
Room 405, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear President Verna:

Almost \$2 million was budgeted and will have been spent on a more than four year process to reform Philadelphia's zoning code. This process began in May 2007 when four out of five voters (79%) approved the creation of an independent Commission to make the zoning code more consistent and easy-to-understand and to enhance and improve the city's planning process.

The Committee of Seventy urges City Council not to permit this prolonged and costly effort to go to waste.

Seventy does not pretend to be an expert in the intricacies of the zoning process. However, in pursuit of our mission to fight for effective government, we have long urged government to simplify and modernize the zoning process. In December 2006 testimony before Council's Law and Government Committee, Seventy pointed to an "out-of-date, confusing and inconsistent [zoning] code that invites unpredictable and subjective decision-making" as a key factor in "driving residents and developers away from Philadelphia to more accommodating locations."

This statement remains true today. An improved zoning code is critical to driving economic growth, attracting new jobs and businesses and enabling Philadelphia to be far better positioned to compete in the global economy.

The importance of this issue for Philadelphia should drive approval of a zoning code reform proposal in this session of Council. We urge both the advocates and opponents of the zoning proposal to resolve their differences – which we understand are far outweighed by mutually agreed upon provisions – in the greater interests of the fundamental reform Philadelphians have asked for and deserve.

Finally, the Committee of Seventy urges City Council to put reasonable controls on the unwritten practice of councilmanic prerogative, either within or outside of the zoning code. As a practical matter, the unrestrained use of councilmanic prerogative discourages development, impedes increased investment in the city and creates the risk of pay-to-play. Unless sensible



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limits are placed on this practice, many of the gains facilitated by a reformed zoning code may be undermined.

I hope you will accept this letter and enter it into the public record.

Sincerely,

Zachary Stalberg
President and CEO