

Judith Rodin, Remarks Prepared for Delivery
“The University and Urban Revival: Out of the Ivory Tower and Into the Streets”
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
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Thank you, Egbert, for that generous introduction. It brings me back to those heady, challenging days when we at Penn didn't know how our efforts in Philadelphia were going to turn out.

But thanks to your leadership – both on the Board of Trustees and the Neighborhood Initiative Committee – we, like so many in the audience, were able to make a difference in our community.

I've been asked to reflect on Penn's experience – not because it's unique, but because it's a case study from which we can generalize.

I want to thank all my colleagues at the Institute for Urban Research – which was, in fact, an outgrowth of our efforts to revitalize West Philadelphia – for your sharp focus on the role anchor institutions ought to play in similar endeavors in urban areas around the world.

Thank you, Egbert, for mentioning the Rockefeller Foundation because our thinking is informed by the constellation of issues that we're talking about today.

We're seeing an extraordinary demographic shift today. For the first time in history, half of the world's population lives in urban areas.

So, understanding cities, the role of cities, and the role of institutions in their cities is never going to be more important.

Globalization is accelerating these trends. It is deindustrializing many western cities and countries and is stretching industrial-sprawl across the developing world.

As these forces press themselves powerfully upon cities around the planet, our discussion about the role of anchor institutions is especially relevant.

The sessions this morning were outstanding examples of the deep learning, tremendous work, and formidable expertise that have emerged over the last few years – across myriad sectors.

They also provided the perfect venue for a certain former university president to try and hock some books.

But seriously, this conference represents a clarion call for those of us who have worked and studied in the field to share our experience and expertise, and to shape an intellectual architecture that can help more institutions do more good in their neighborhoods, communities, and cities.

As the Penn Institute for Urban Research and this remarkable gathering illustrate, we have a superb community gathered around these issues: policymakers, developers, planners, city leaders, scholars and activists to take up the cause.

I think we're all better educated and more energized by the deep thinking and vibrant creativity that's enhancing our understanding of how single anchor institutions operate, how a variety of institutions within a city come together, and the requisite connectivity among anchor institutions, city governments, and private developers.

Over the last decade, a whole host of anchor institutions have breathed new life into neighborhoods, communities, and cities by engaging and investing in real partnerships.

Universities and medical centers, in particular, have taken on this role – viewing it both as an obligation and an opportunity.

It's an obligation because urban universities are a special kind of urban citizen – and good citizenship means taking responsibility, not just taking advantage of tax privileges.

It's an obligation because these same institutions often helped to destroy poor neighborhoods in their drive to grow and expand.

It's an opportunity for “eds and meds” to serve a greater social good at the same time as they do well for their students, faculty, and mission.

It's an opportunity to model active civic engagement for our students.

If we want to teach them to lead in solving the most difficult problems of the day – issues of race and class, blight and poverty – then how we confront these issues as institutions represents a major lesson.

And it's an opportunity to be engines of economic development because “eds and meds” are strategically positioned to drive community revitalization.

They are poised with their resources and deep knowledge base to address poverty, unemployment, crime, and affordable housing.

The days when industry, financial institutions, and public utilities were the largest employers in most cities are gone.

As manufacturing jobs left town, and as banks and public utilities consolidated, “eds and meds” became the largest employers – the economic lifeblood – of many regions.

In America's twenty largest cities, institutions of higher learning or academic medical centers are among the top ten private employers.

35 percent of the people who work for private employers in those cities are employed by universities and their medical centers.

In four cities – Washington, San Diego, Baltimore, and Philadelphia – institutions of higher learning and medical facilities account for more than half the jobs available.

So, it is clear that “eds and meds” can drive local and regional economy – as producers, employers, and enormous consumers of goods and services – and unlike industry, they cannot be easily sold, acquired, or moved thousands of miles away.

They’re capable of generating an enormous impact through their purchasing power, investment strategies, real estate holdings, training and technical capacity, and employment practices.

Just think of the scale we’re talking about.

America’s higher education sector makes up almost 4 percent of our national economy.

If it were a country, the sector would have a GDP of more than \$350 billion, greater than half the GDP of Mexico.

In 1996, for example, more than 1,900 urban universities spent \$136 billion on salaries, goods, and services – nine times greater than federal spending on urban business and job development in the same year.

These same institutions accounted for 2 million American jobs and held more than \$100 billion in real estate.

For these reasons and more, the efforts of “eds and meds” to serve as anchor institutions really heated up in the mid-1990s.

Many university leaders, mayors, think-tanks, and organizations like CEOs for Cities, saw this extraordinary opportunity and obligation.

All over the United States, colleges and universities began to ask themselves hard questions about what they could and should do in their communities, and many were moved to action. Penn was among them.

By 1996, University City was a disquieting place, not only for its many problems, but for its neglected possibilities.

Those of us associated with the university and city had watched Penn grow as an institution while its relationship with the neighborhood waxed and waned over decades.

In truth, the waning years far outnumbered the waxing ones.

By the time I had the great privilege of leading the University of Pennsylvania, it was abundantly clear that since the future of the neighborhood and that of the university were inextricably intertwined, they were equally endangered.

The blight of the neighborhood became the plight of the university – it hurt us academically, institutionally, and in terms of our reputation.

Students felt less safe and parents felt less comfortable sending them here. Crime soared. One in five residents lived below the poverty level. Shops and businesses closed. Families abandoned their houses. The streets filled with trash. Pedestrian traffic vanished. Middle class families moved out, and drug dealers moved in.

We knew by then that we could not have a future as a truly great university in a disintegrating community – even if we were foolish enough to want such a thing.

Either the neighborhood would improve – becoming a safe place to live, work, study, play, raise, and educate children – or the university would deteriorate.

We needed to become a force for strengthening our community and building its efficacy, rather than just acquiring its land and displacing its citizens to raise more buildings.

Some of you here today joined that effort.

We learned together that we couldn't just renew the neighborhood; we had to play a part in the neighborhood's self-renewal.

We needed to be a partner. We needed other partners to join with us.

And in the process, we demonstrated just what a powerful impact a university can make when it accepts that its destiny is entwined with that of its neighbors -- not just an impact in the community, but in the consciousness of its students, who, because of our engagement, entered their post-Penn lives better prepared, as Ghandi said, "to become the change they wish to see in the world."

We worked together on safety and security, housing and commercial development, public education and employment, on building a vibrant community.

Along the way, many of us – me included – had to give up a little, struggle a little, defer a little, and trust a little.

But the outcome was a much stronger, more vital community -- physically and economically, but also psychologically.

Hope had returned to West Philadelphia.

Penn found that, like all anchor institutions, it had a crucial leadership role to play – but sometimes we played the preacher, other times we stepped back into the choir.

We also learned that it's relatively easy to discover great ideas in this work, but extraordinarily hard to implement them.

Action, implementation, and execution, after all, are what matter.

Of course, whenever I hear the word execution, I'm reminded of the famous quip by the late John McKay, who went from coaching national championship football teams at Southern Cal to coaching the NFL expansion Tampa Bay Buccaneers, which lost its first 26 games.

During that losing streak, which stretched over two seasons, a reporter asked McKay what he thought of his team's execution.

Without missing a beat, McKay replied, "I'm in favor of it."

Now, I can tell you, that when Penn first proposed to devote substantial resources toward redeveloping University City, many members of the academic community were not much kinder.

Although they did not call for the execution of Penn's leaders, they did wonder -- often aloud -- what we were smoking.

This is not work for the faint of heart.

But start we did, pledging to transform the neighborhood -- slowly -- grounded in a commitment to continuous, extensive community consultation.

We also -- actively and overtly -- made several promises about what we would not do.

We would never expand our campus to the west or north into residential neighborhoods.

We would only expand east into an area made up entirely of abandoned buildings and commercial real estate -- and, by the way, that exciting new work linking Penn to Center City on the east at the Schuylkill River is being undertaken today.

We would not act unilaterally. Instead we would candidly discuss what we could do with the community.

And we wouldn't be pushed to promise what we couldn't deliver. Instead we would limit long-term commitments to promises we could keep -- and leverage our resources, stimulating major investments by the private sector.

We didn't set ourselves up to disappoint the community, but made sure that the people who stood to gain and lose the most from our actions had a voice in shaping them.

We started by taking a holistic perspective -- and this is important to stress.

We worked on initiatives simultaneously rather than chronologically. We saw ourselves as an economic engine that could power renewal. We put our own skin in the game.

Specifically, we focused on five interconnected initiatives -- not piecemeal, but comprehensively -- simultaneously and aggressively.

We systematized and integrated our intervention, looking over and over again for leverage.

First, we would restore clean, safe, well-lit, and green streets and neighborhoods,

Second, we would work to provide high-quality, diverse housing choices – both homeownership and rental across a spectrum of price points.

Third, we would revive commercial activity and accelerate overall economic development that would spill back into the community to expand growth and opportunity.

Fourth, we would improve the local public schools.

And fifth, we would collaborate with the city to expand the role of an anchor institution in leading and helping Philadelphia to realize its own aspirations.

We knew that economic development, retail construction, public education, home ownership, affordable housing, and safe, attractive streets all leverage one another, creating a dynamic multiplier effect.

To make the neighborhood safer, cleaner, and lighter, we beefed up our Division of Public Safety by hiring more police officers including bicycle units and detectives and investing in cutting-edge technology.

We opened a new police station further west beyond campus, co-locating it with the Philadelphia police precinct substation.

And we created a special services district, which employs safety ambassadors who patrol the streets of University City, and public space maintenance workers, who supplement city units and help remove graffiti and litter.

Many of these people were welfare-to-work participants, thus contributing to another social action goal.

We also partnered with neighborhood residents, the electrician's union, and the local electric company to install fixtures to uniformly light the sidewalks of 1,200 neighborhood properties.

Not only did these efforts create a brighter and cleaner neighborhood, which attracted increased foot traffic, but by requiring whole blocks, rather than individual homeowners, to commit, we encouraged a revival of community associations, block by block.

And this led to greening projects, like planting 450 trees and 10,000 spring bulbs, and creating four public and three children's gardens -- all of which set the stage for a dramatic transformation of Clark Park from a dangerous drug-infested space into a thriving recreational site for children and a weekly farmer's market.

The results of these efforts are reflected in crime statistics, streetscape improvements, and neighborhood perception and awards.

Crime reports dropped 40 percent between 1996 and 2002, and another 14 percent between 2002 and 2003.

I've just seen the 2007 report card, and all these gains are holding.

In annual surveys, at least 70 percent of respondents indicate that the neighborhood's atmosphere has improved dramatically, and over 70 percent indicate that they feel very safe in University City.

And Penn's Division of Public Safety earned recognition from all corners – including the prestigious Clery Award from Security on Campus, a national nonprofit organization.

But this was just the beginning, and along with making University City cleaner and safer, Penn also sought to expand the availability of affordable housing – both for rental and home ownership.

Unless a neighborhood's declining and deteriorating housing market can be stabilized, a community can not thrive.

We believed that Penn had the resources, energy, and creative talent to help turn the housing market around.

We began by acquiring twenty abandoned properties in strategic spots, rehabbing them, and then selling them to the public at a loss to the university.

Penn wasn't looking to make a profit on these homes.

We were looking to make West Philadelphia a more attractive place to live and work – and demonstrating with tangible actions that we believed in the residential viability of the neighborhood.

Here, too, we used a number of approaches to achieve a mix of housing options and prices.

And we generated strong outcomes:

Properties in University City appreciated 154 percent in value between 1994 and 2004, substantially outpacing Philadelphia and the rest of the country.

Average sale prices of single-family houses rose from \$78,500 in 1995 to \$175,000 in 2003.

To stem gentrification, Penn and its partners improved more than 200 units of low-income, rental housing – transforming them into attractive, well managed, and, most importantly, fully occupied neighborhood assets.

Private developers built and renovated apartments and condominiums as well – often on university properties with 40- to 90-year ground leases with reversionary clauses back to the university.

We learned, here, that universities can also use their own policies to stimulate the housing development process.

By initiating a welcoming, academically energizing residential, college house program, Penn was able to attract more undergraduates back to campus housing, and away from West Philadelphia's run-down, student group houses, which could now be renovated.

But to make the neighborhood more vibrant still, we needed to provide retail and cultural amenities – and to engineer radical improvements in the public schools.

We resolved to undertake two large-scale, mixed-use, retail development projects in hopes that they would anchor other shops, restaurants, theatres, and private development.

And then we resolved to plan and build a public school.

Let me talk first about our effort to revive the retail and commercial economy and accelerate economic growth.

Along one largely deserted stretch of Walnut Street, we built a 300,000 square foot project that included the luxury hotel where we are meeting today, the beautiful new Penn bookstore, public plazas, and a raft of stores and restaurants.

At the periphery of the campus at 40th and Walnut, we developed a 75,000 square foot project that would create stronger ties between town and gown: a new movie theater and new supermarket and scores of small neighborhood-friendly stores and restaurants, artist studios, and meeting places – all to reanimate a dying commercial corridor that had divided Penn from its community.

Penn had inked a deal with Robert Redford and Sundance Cinemas in 1998 to build the movie theater.

It would show independent and experimental films, and feature an art gallery and café, a video library, community meeting spaces, and perhaps a jazz club.

Across the street would be a multi-story parking garage atop an innovative new supermarket, Freshgrocer.

Construction was proceeding apace two years later when the parent company, General Cinema, filed for bankruptcy and pulled the plug on the Sundance Theatre project.

Just like that, a critical project stalled and my lunches with Robert Redford came to a sad end.

Predictably, some admonished Penn for biting off more than we could chew, urging us to suspend the search for another partner.

True, it was not easy convincing the trustees to spend more money to seal the deal we eventually struck with National Amusements.

But at the end of the day, and less than two years after the Sundance project collapsed, the Bridge Cinema de Lux – a sensational state-of-the-art movie theatre complex – opened to rave reviews.

The Bridge attracts a half-million patrons a year – and if you were to visit the Freshgrocer tonight at 10:00 PM or 2:00 AM, you would see throngs of students and neighborhood residents shopping, noshing, and schmoozing.

Welcoming large crowds on the streets has made the neighborhood safer and more diverse. It's been a shot in the arm for the local economy. And it's made University City attractive to outside developers.

But we learned first hand – and painfully – that this is risky work and needs real stakeholders and believers, as well as deep experts, because things will go wrong.

And this wasn't just about building and attracting amenities. This was also about infusing robust, sustainable economic vitality back into the neighborhood – providing new jobs and new opportunities for local businesses to thrive.

We developed a detailed, inclusive approach to contracting, procurement, construction, and employment – and deployed our purchasing power more strategically.

We required that our construction projects, both on and off campus, create substantial access for women and minorities to the trades that would do the actual building.

We redirected 10 percent of our annual purchasing toward local vendors by 2003, injecting more than \$70 million into West Philadelphia's economy.

And we invested in small businesses that created opportunity for other members of a community that had been left behind by the global economic transformations of the 1980s.

We created many mentoring programs – one of which helped several small businesses acquire e-commerce capability, not just enabling them to serve us more effectively, but making them more viable and competitive in the open market.

Of the \$550 million that Penn spent on construction programs over a seven year period, \$134 million, nearly a quarter, was committed to minority- and women-owned businesses, mostly in the neighborhood.

Penn now directly employs more than 3,000 West Philadelphia residents.

In sum, all these interventions have proven remarkably effective in revitalizing University City – as you will see during your tours tomorrow afternoon.

But while all of this restored safety, life, and economic capacity into the neighborhood, it still wasn't enough.

If we wanted to make the neighborhood a more viable place for families to live, we had to improve public education.

Penn students and faculty had served this community over a number of years.

They were committed in their efforts, and made a measurable and meaningful impact in the lives of many Philadelphia children.

But to create bold, transformational change – to give families in the neighborhood greater faith in our efforts and hope for the future – we needed to think bigger.

So, we reached out to the public, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, the city, and the school district with an idea: that we build, together, a neighborhood public school.

Nothing like this had ever been tried before – at least in Philadelphia.

It took a year of thinking, persuasion, and compromise among myriad stakeholders to reach an agreement that we should move forward.

It took another year of painstaking, thoughtful collaboration with educators and community representatives to design and plan the school.

Then it took still another year to address the fears and legitimate concerns of residents – some of whom were suspicious of our motives, and others of whom didn't want to be left out in the cold

Ultimately, it led to the creation of the Penn Alexander School in 2001 – a pre-K-through-8 neighborhood public school near Penn's campus.

You can only attend the school if you live in the neighborhood.

The results were just as we hoped. The 700 faces in the student body look like the faces in the community – 60 percent African American, 20 percent Caucasian, 18 percent Asian, 6 percent Latino, and 25 percent international.

Class size is substantially lower than the citywide average. After its first two years, 80 percent of primary-grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading. Children are winning citywide awards in math and science.

But we did not want to create one school of “haves” and leave the rest of the system for “have nots,” so Penn has become more deeply involved in all the public schools in West Philadelphia as well – emphasizing technology, teacher education, and curriculum development.

As many of you have found in your communities, there is no doubt that Penn has been transformed by our engagement in ours.

We overcame decades of hostile and dysfunctional relations with our neighbors.

We widened the circle of opportunity so everybody would benefit.

And, lest we forget, the West Philadelphia Initiatives played a crucial role in revitalizing Penn – its rankings, faculty awards, student applications, selectivity, growth in endowment – just as Penn played a crucial role in revitalizing West Philadelphia.

We had to encourage key faculty members to understand and support deployment of fungible resources on non-academic expenditures.

We had to embrace local officials as partners.

It was challenging work – but by reorienting the way we worked as an institution, with whom we worked, and what we were willing to commit, we found a way to help make the neighborhood and the university prosper together.

Sure, many voices that used to rail against Penn are still screaming. But now that they have a seat at the table, they do not shout quite as much or quite as loud.

What have we and other engaged anchor institutions learned?

While each of us had different experiences, I would venture that each of us would argue that the necessity of replacing inaction with action, isolation with partnership, is universally applicable.

Skeptical bystanders can become engaged stakeholders.

From our experience in West Philadelphia, I would propose six valuable lessons about strategies and practices that can help anchor institutions transform urban neighborhoods.

First, any successful urban strategy must be just that: strategic.

It must be bold, yet based on a realistic and full assessment of social, economic, and political forces at work – and it must have a clear roadmap toward implementation.

Second, it must be holistic.

This is the only way to capitalize on resources effectively, leverage the impact of individual interventions, and promote greater sustainability.

Economic development, high quality public schools, diverse housing choices and safe neighborhoods are all essential elements of a diverse, healthy community.

And the only way to heal a social ill is to mount an integrated attack on the conditions at its root.

Third, collaboration and transparency are critical. You cannot do this work in secret.

We learned in West Philadelphia that there is never a unanimously shared perspective and only rarely a shared definition of community.

Individual, family, and institutional needs can vary widely just from one street to the next.

Effective community development, then, requires engagement with many different elements and interests – citizens and neighborhoods, schools and churches, sometimes block by block and group by group.

Since each city block has its own perspective, each block also ought to have a voice in the needs assessment.

But not everyone has an equal say in making the decisions. So, leadership at the top really matters.

Fourth, be careful about raising expectations. You must be willing to say what you can and cannot do, identify and act on a few highly visible, targeted initiatives, define measurable goals, and make mid-course corrections when necessary.

Fifth, your campus plan and on campus building need to be integrated with your community development goals.

You can not plan your campus over here, plan your community development over there, and hope to have an impact if you do not link the two.

Sixth, while time is of the essence, patience is essential.

Community revitalization and civic leadership is a journey not a destination.

We all want it to happen in an instant – to show Polaroids of the before and after.

But the truth is that change is tedious and phased.

It comes in fits and starts, and the first step is just making sure you're headed in the right direction.

Things don't always work out as planned.

And no agenda for change – however well-conceived or well-received – wins unanimous support.

When alliances are formed with relevant stakeholders, however, more and more allies can be recruited over term.

What did we at Penn learn?

We learned that a university can – and should – play a lead role in urban transformation by changing its perspective and altering its patterns of interaction.

This is not something you can do to the neighborhood, or even for the neighborhood. You must do this with the neighborhood.

Revitalization must be undertaken in concert with the community – its residents and activists, its community associations and city officials, its university administrators, students, and faculty.

I believe fervently that this ties in with our most fundamental mission as educators.

It is especially incumbent upon universities to engage in their communities because it is the best way to prepare students to engage actively in the world.

It is not enough to produce brilliant doctors, lawyers, writers, artists, scientists, and scholars.

We must produce good citizens – we must teach people how to think and to act, to do good and to do well, and to commit to the heavy lifting of building community.

In this way, Penn’s engagement with its neighbors has had as profound a regenerating effect on the university as it has on the neighborhood.

I’m sure you have found the same in your endeavors.

Faculty became energized in their search for new ways to bring knowledge and experience to bear on local problems and beyond.

Our mathematics chair at the time, Dennis DeTurk, told me that if anyone had told him ten years earlier that he would be writing a National Science Foundation proposal for funding to test the new math curriculum he was to implement in our local K-12 schools, he would surely have thought them crazy.

Throughout the university, in all its departments and schools, many faculty members became substantively, deeply engaged.

This was no longer scholarship about the community – Philadelphia was not a convenient laboratory on our doorstep – this was scholarship with the community, directly engaging its needs and its potential.

These efforts didn’t just challenge and capture the scholarly imagination of the faculty; they became magnets for students who were excited by the ideas and passion this commitment represented.

We educated through action – building on the powerful notion that talented students would contribute more to society when they left Penn, if we offered them an institutional example of active civic engagement while they were here.

Because we, as an institution, participated in the conversations of democracy, our students learned first-hand – along with us – the challenges and abiding value of participatory process.

And in the end, by breathing new life into a decaying, dying neighborhood, the very life we saved may have been our own.

In medieval times, universities were conceived apart from, not a part of, the outside world.

They confined themselves inside walls – and laid the bricks and mortar of a tradition that barricaded learning from acting, barricaded theory from practice, and barricaded gown from town.

It wasn’t long ago that many American universities built higher walls still – behaving like they were back in the fourteenth-century.

They installed gates. They built skywalks so students never had to set foot on city streets.

They may have bought themselves greater safety – or at least the illusion of safety – but through their actions, they hastened the deterioration outside their gates.

In our way at Penn – and in the wide range of endeavors others are undertaking around the county -- we are tearing down the inheritance of these walls.

And we are building, in their place, new opportunities.

Opportunities for universities to model civic engagement for their students, by breaking down the curricular barriers between analyzing and assessing the world and actively shaping it.

Opportunities for universities to do well for themselves by doing good in their communities.

Thank you all again for coming.

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