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## City design comes to Philly

By GREGORY HELLER

THE mayors are coming! For the first time ever, the Mayors' Institute on City Design will hold a national session in Philadelphia, tomorrow through Saturday. It's a big deal.

In good economies and bad, civic design is critical to a city's economic development, quality of life and image. For generations, the planning and design decisions we make today will affect our identity, the form of our development projects and their relation to the rest of the city, the quality of our neighborhoods, strength of our downtown and transit network.

Investing in good planning and design can serve to attract residents, improve safety, transform communities and promote a more competitive city. For some positive local examples, look at the Avenue of the Arts or University City - both cases where an investment in design spurred impacts way beyond aesthetics.

Design is an issue the mayor deals with regularly. Just a few issues that Mayor Nutter weighed in on in the last year that affect city design: American Commerce Center, Burholme Park, casinos, Centennial District, Delaware waterfront, South Street Bridge, Youth Study Center, zoning-code commission.

The U.S. cities that have invested in civic design have leaders who embrace their role as the city's chief designer. The mayor can hire and appoint great people, but ultimately it's critical for the boss to understand the fundamentals of good planning and urban design.

This thinking is the reason for the Mayors' Institute, a national program founded in 1986 and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, American Architectural Foundation and U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Each year, the institute picks host cities for its national sessions, where it convenes exclusive workshops of mayors and leading design pros (no more than 20 participants) to work through actual situations in the participants' cities.

The sessions are designed for chief executives: high-powered, down-and-dirty, real-life problems. The sessions are closed to let the mayors speak freely.

Many of the nation's big cities have already hosted the Mayors' Institute and many big-name mayors have participated, including Richard Daley of Chicago, Manuel Diaz of Miami, Tom

Menino of Boston, Gavin Newsom of San Francisco, Ray Nagin of New Orleans, John Hickenlooper of Denver and Anthony Williams of Washington.

Our own deputy mayor for planning and economic development, Andy Altman, participated in the Mayors' Institute when he worked in the District of Columbia Office of Planning.

Mayor Nutter has been a strong supporter of good planning and urban design and deserves praise for inviting the institute to Philadelphia. The fact that he'll be participating shows his commitment to these issues, while emphasizing that this city is intent on becoming a national leader in planning and design.

There is precedent for mayors going through institute training before making national headlines for their city design focus. Chicago's Mayor Daley went through it, then invested in that city's famous Millennium Park. Mayor Williams of Washington went through it when he was in office, then invested in neighborhood and downtown development projects.

BECAUSE the institute is exclusive and closed-door, the program often has a low profile in its host cities.

But the institute is working to change that. In Philadelphia, the private sessions will be accompanied by a litany of public events, including a public reception on Friday evening.

Stay tuned to the institute's Web site ([www.micd.org](http://www.micd.org)) and please come out for the public events.

This is a great opportunity for Philadelphians to celebrate our city's planning and design progress, and contemplate the potential of our urban future. \*

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