

“Civic Infrastructure” Fuels Philadelphia’s Neighborhood Revitalization

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While visible transformations like new gardens, vibrant markets, and affordable housing projects are reshaping Philadelphia’s neighborhoods, their success is often underpinned by a less apparent but crucial foundation: a robust network of shared tools, data, relationships, and knowledge. Organizations like Clean and Green Philly are at the forefront of providing this vital “civic infrastructure.”

This civic infrastructure encompasses the platforms, data systems, and collaborative networks that empower community groups, non-profits, and city agencies to act decisively, coordinate effectively, and achieve greater impact. However, the indirect and distributed benefits of this work often lead to it being misunderstood or undervalued.

“This is the ‘multiplier’ effect,” explains a spokesperson for Clean and Green Philly. “When we invest in shared infrastructure—open data platforms, technical support, governance structures, and collaborative spaces—we enable dozens of projects to connect ideas, avoid duplication, and build on each other’s progress.” Neglecting these foundational elements can lead to a gradual but significant decline in data access, weakened coordination, fading institutional knowledge, and slowed momentum.

Enabling Transformation Through Data

Launched in 2023, **Clean and Green Philly** serves as a volunteer-powered civic data platform. It aggregates public data on Philadelphia’s approximately 600,000 property parcels, with a specific focus on the more than 35,000 vacant properties. This data is enriched with information on property ownership, gun violence incidents, maintenance violations, and LandCare status, making it accessible and actionable for

anyone involved in cleaning, greening, or repurposing vacant properties.

Clean and Green Philly functions as an underlying infrastructure, enabling the success of other initiatives. By providing residents, civic groups, and non-profits with enhanced data and foundational support, it allows them to operate more efficiently, advocate more strategically, and develop stronger projects. For instance, **Habitat for Humanity** leverages this infrastructure to acquire vacant properties and convert them into permanently affordable housing. Similarly, the **57 Blocks Coalition** utilizes shared data and tools to coordinate efforts like maintaining vacant lots and reducing illegal dumping, maximizing community benefit.

This distinction is critical: while direct projects deliver tangible change, the enabling infrastructure provides the shared data, tools, and coordination that make those changes possible and sustainable for all. For community leaders, organizers, and advocates, investing in and leveraging this infrastructure ensures that every project, regardless of its size or resources, can achieve a greater and more lasting impact.