

Thrift Tip: Green is Thrifty

Philadelphia Profile in Thrift: [Penn Future's Next Great City Initiative](#)

“We will be a thrifty nation when we all learn conservation.”
—The Treasure Twins (children’s book), 1923

Thrift Tip of the Day: Sign up your home or business for [RecycleBank](#) rewards. Encourage your local public officials to implement an incentivized recycling program.

Fast Facts

- The Next Great City Initiative coalition includes 130 organizations.
- In 2005, Philadelphia had a 5.2 percent recycling rate, the second worst rate among large cities in the country.
- In 2010, Philadelphia became the largest city to participate in [RecycleBank](#), a for-profit incentivized recycling program that rewards residents for recycling. It now has an 18 percent diversion rate.

The New Thrift Goes Green Why Green is Thrifty

Since thrift is fundamentally the wise use of resources, to live sustainably is to be thrifty!

Learn More About Next Great City An interview with Christine Knapp, Director of Outreach at Penn Future

Tell us a little bit more about the Next Great City Initiative.

“Penn Future started the initiative in 2005, because at the time we knew that there was going to be a Mayor’s election in 2007 and that it was an open election. We saw this as a real opportunity to inject issues of environment and sustainability into that race to get the issues talked about. . . . And then secondarily we also wanted to bring together a large coalition. There are a lot of environmental organizations in Philadelphia but there hadn’t been a campaign to bring them all together. And partly for that reason there wasn’t a lot of clout in this community.”

How many organizations are part of the Next Great City Initiative?

“Our coalition is now [130 organizations](#). And that runs the gamut from environmental groups, health groups, churches, labor unions, a few businesses, and a lot of community and civic organizations.”

What did you first aim to accomplish?

"We emerged with our [ten point agenda](#) of what we wanted the next Mayor to do. It covered a pretty wide range of things, from planting trees to reducing air emissions from city trucks. . . . We framed them as common sense and cost effective."

Have any of those objectives been accomplished?

"Depending on how you do the accounting, we're actually at about seven out of ten of our objectives being accomplished. We had always planned on releasing a second phase, but then Mayor Nutter then turned around and released [Greenworks](#). It was kind of a reaction to Next Great City, but him saying, 'I'm going to do even better than this. I'm going to be really ambitious.'"

One of your ten objectives was to expand recycling. Tell us more about the incentivized recycling program.

"It is run by a for-profit company called RecycleBank, originally started by two MBA students who were from Philadelphia but then went to Columbia University. This was essentially their MBA thesis. The way it works is that everyone who signs up gets one of these stickers to put on your bucket—kind of like Easy Pass—and the scanner or reader is on the truck. You get points based the participation in your community. You get two points for recycling and one point for trash reduction, so it's a true diversion model. If you do something to reduce having trash in the first place you can get rewarded for that. And then you can log on to their website and there's a series of hundreds of rewards partners where you can get discounts and vouchers at local businesses. The way they make their money is that they're saving cities money on both landfill costs and they're increasing the amount of money they can make on the sale of recyclable materials on the commodities market. So in Philadelphia it's the difference of saving I think \$65 a ton at the landfill and then they can make \$50 a ton by selling the recyclable material."

How many people are signed up for RecycleBank?

"We just had a training last night for a group of about ten of us and each of us is going to train ten other people so that we can go around and get people signed up for RecycleBank. Right now there are 110,000 households signed up out of 550,000 so we're hoping to help them boost that."

How can people in the community get involved in the work that you're doing?

"For the next phase, it's going to be about a couple things—spreading the word and bringing in new partners. We'd love to have people sign their church up, sign their civic association up, their bowling club—just any group of people. And share the information. That's a hard thing. For more information people can visit www.nextgreatcity.com, and sign up for our bi-weekly newsletter. You can also sign your organization up to be a part of the coalition by contacting me at knapp@pennfuture.org."

Information courtesy of www.newthrift.org