

PlanPhilly: I couldn't help noticing that you're campaigning around the theme of "One Philadelphia."

Anthony Williams: I am.

PP: I'm wondering, practically speaking, what that means in terms of the development and planning of the city.

AW: Great question. The tension between gentrification and those who've been here for a while, specifically low- and moderate-income, and the new generation that's moving here, either empty-nesters and people who have money tends to be a conversation that's had in neighborhoods that reflects division.

And it depends on who you talk to. If you use the word gentrification in one group it's like, oh, it's a bad thing, and in another group it reflects millennials. I think both are kind of insignificant, because first of all millennials are not just Center City professionals; they're diverse people across Philadelphia.

That's the first thing. The second thing: gentrifying a neighborhood, provided you put in certain obvious understandings, it's a good thing. The fact that an open lot has been that way for a long time and causes problems, the person who's a senior doesn't want that. They just are concerned about, are they going to be taxed out of their homes?

There's a couple things. One, we have a serious issue relative to information-sharing and education on all levels. It's much different than it was when I was a kid living in Philadelphia. Community groups, faith-based groups, churches did a good job, so your neighbor can tell you from reading the newspaper, that's not the case today. Services go unused. So you'll have somebody in a home who talks about gentrification, they complain about it, they don't know that there's a program that actually sort of alleviates your tax burden.

Further, they don't know this, and they really don't know this at all: if your property goes up three or four hundred percent, it means you have equity. And that means you have a lot more equity than the tax is going to go up, you have equity to make improvements, equity to repair it, to live in it, to sustain it, support it, take out another mortgage. There's a lot of things, even on a fixed income, and a modest income that you can do that is significant that I have not seen people understand.

We have a lot of information that we need to get to communities that see these signs, buy a house for a cash, houses we know is probably worth as a shell probably \$100,000, they sell it for

\$60,000, and they redo it for \$200,000. There's a lot of misinformation that exists that could push us collectively in the direction of fixing up our neighborhoods.

PP: So educating people as to the value of what they have in terms of when neighborhoods are changing.

AW: Exactly. So, around that issue of development, that's what that means. One Philadelphia.

PP: And how can a mayor, how could you as mayor capture some of the prosperity that's been accruing to Center City for example and help spread it out to some of the neighborhoods that are struggling.

AW: You're actually a really good questioner. I'm not blowing smoke up your butt. But because I write policies about this, that's a good question. So 40 some odd percent of our growth in Center City and the other portions around Penn, Drexel, why don't you have tax policies that align in a different way. So the long answer, I can give long answers right?

PP: Sure.

AW: So South Street and Main Street in Manayunk. Two streets in—are you from here?

PP: I'm from just outside the city but I've been here for 10 years.

AW: So when I was young, South Street was dilapidated, they used to call it Skid Row. The city targeted an area and drove commerce to that section. And the zoning process that the mayor has, the mapping that he's doing I think is very good. I think that will support the ideas about how we actually map out an economy across the City of Philadelphia.

Then we've got to apply that to tax policy. Or abatement policy for tax credits. Abatements which are significant and people see them as sort of high-rises in Philadelphia, which, the truth is, they're more than high-rises. We could take that same concept and take a law firm. Significant sized law firm planted in a neighborhood in West Philadelphia, Northeast Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, whatever it is: free parking. And you can drive an economy around it, secondary markets.

So we need to be smart about how we map out the future economically and driving business there. Two, we need to support it with tax policies that make sense. And third, L&I, the experience we need to become business friendly so that those who would even consider it, once we actually market it and brand it, can actually get through the process of paperwork and all that other stuff.

PP: I want to come back to the abatement stuff in a minute, but do you think that the kind of—the question I was asking was sort of about the prosperity that's accruing in Center City and

spreading it outwardly—do you think that that's what the outlying neighborhoods need? The same type of development pattern that's been happening in the city that's been revitalizing Center City.

AW: So, it's not going to be the same type of development. Because you have significant commercial properties and a different type of density. And for the most part you have a different kind of income level. That won't necessarily be driven out to neighborhoods. But middle-income people, and even those who are on fixed incomes, have the ability to turn their dollars over locally. And frankly, they would turn over more if there's a local economy than if you have to travel to the mall or travel to Center city. People actually go to, as they have in the past, to neighborhood stores to buy their food.

So provided you actually have a mixed economy, that means moving the abatement out to a neighborhood, middle class, like around Penn for instance, there's a very integrated economy. It's not Penn or else, it's Penn plus modest and lower-income, so when you go on Baltimore Avenue, I'd say between 51st Street and down towards Penn, you have a collage of restaurants and types of businesses that are—we actually have a brewery—all those things are doing well because there's turnover dollars, and it's integrated dollars. So that's what you need in neighborhoods. So it wouldn't look exactly like Center City, but it would mimic behavior.

PP: So take Point Breeze as an example. I know you have a relationship with Councilman Johnson. The way Point Breeze has been developing over the past five or ten years has been pretty stark, things are happening there pretty quickly, and development seems to be following a certain pattern of residential development, and to a lesser extent commercial stuff. And I'm wondering what you think about that as a model for neighborhoods that have been struggling in the past and now are sort of getting more attention from developers. Do you think that's happening in a healthy way?

AW: Another one of those tension moments. So they actually rename neighborhoods to brand them. I'm not sure that's the best thing to do if you want to help neighborhoods reconcile; I wouldn't necessarily do it that way. And I understand that—well, I guess I don't understand. I guess the developer decided he had to change the name to make it sound different so that people would buy properties there.

But other areas that I've lived in around Penn that have actually never changed the name, change was involved and they had mixed populations, I more prefer to see some of that—I wouldn't say more prefer, but I think it's a model of acceptance. You have a certain type of developer who works with the community so they want to educate their own about development.

One, what are the development properties here? You're not going to be driven out. Equity, tax policy protects you. Let's start there. Here's what it's going to look like as we evolve. I think that's probably the breath of fresh air that I would like to see across the City of Philadelphia.

I am a little biased; it's my area. But it is really one of the most significantly mixed, economically, ethnically, academically, socially, in the entire city of Philadelphia. When you walk by those parks—there's two: Clark Park and another park up the street—there's a guy who clearly has a brown bag and he's playing checkers with a kid from Penn.

And I'm not saying they don't have crime, but it's very much controlled. And people for the most part feel safe. And I think that's because they have interacted a lot more in terms of development than most.

I think that ones that you're referring to with Kenyatta [Johnson] is, there are success stories certainly, but there are some struggles from the tension that, people are just not educated what they can do. And there hasn't been a lot of communication about development.

They're trying. And some of those neighbors are actually trying; I've gone to a few events where it's clearly driven toward communities coming together. So the neighbors get it, but they have a lot more to do.

PP: So to come back to the abatement for a second, do you think that the way the abatement is currently structured is the right way to do it? Citywide, 10-year tax abatement to anybody who builds anything at all? Do you think that it should be targeted more to neighborhoods, or ...?

AW: I mean, yeah, it should be targeted more toward neighborhoods because they need the growth. Not because it's a bad thing to have something go up in Center City. That's the point. People sort of are angry about the abatement process—

PP: Because they see it happening in Center City more than anywhere else—

AW: Yeah, but it's not. Low-income folks have used the abatement process here for low-income development, affordable housing as well as people who have million-dollar properties. So while it doesn't stretch across the expanse of the city in a prominent way, and it hasn't gotten a name in that regard, I would think that we would emphasize neighborhood development with regard to abatements in Philadelphia. And I think that the development community would want that.

I think we have a tool in the Land Bank process that now we can couple it with it. So you take an abatement, identify a developer based upon land tracts because we can organize them more effectively, and sell them, in a way that we haven't in the past.

PP: So not necessarily changing the way the abatement works on the books, but—

AW: The abatement is flexible. I think that's—people say you need to modify it, and I see we need to modify it, but the truth is when you really look at it, it's not that, it's how we've applied it. It's amenable to where you want to use it. It's not that product, it's how we've focused on certain sections and not really done a good job of explaining it to folks.

PP: While we're on the topic, I know you've talked about this a little bit before and I know it's kind of a state issue, but with respect to the uniformity clause, taxing all properties across the city the same way—obviously you wouldn't have a magic wand as mayor, but if you did, would you want to change that and how would you want to change that?

AW: So I've taken a bill and introduced it in Harrisburg. So working with Paul Levy and others in that business community, yeah, I've drafted the bill. I don't know if we've introduced it or not, but we're going to introduce it, and for the reasons that they talk about. I don't have to explain it because you already understand it. So yeah, I would like to have it because I think it would give a lot of advantage to Philadelphia, not only over other competing areas in Pennsylvania but frankly—

PP: And pretend I don't know how it works, but the idea would be to—

AW: Uncouple it, so we tax commercial the same way we tax residential, and the concept of that is when you raise commercial you have to raise residential. And the idea is that because they're coupled together, one, this market which may be artificially modest drags down this market, which can grow, if you do certain things to it. If you uncouple it, one, you can certainly control the impact of residential property taxes. At the same time, you can raise the taxes on commercial properties, and given all the nickel-and-diming that we do, thereby do a couple things. One, we could drive up [commercial] rents, which they want to do dramatically here. And two, we could reduce the wage tax, which would also attract more people to Philadelphia that have wages.

PP: I want to talk a little bit about transportation stuff. I'm wondering if you can start by just telling me a little bit about what you learned while you were on the board of directors of SEPTA.

AW: [Laughs]

PP: I'm not sure how long you served on that board, but I'm just curious—

AW: I was in the House [of Representatives for Pennsylvania]. It might have been four years, five max. I learned that politics—I don't know what it's like now because this was a long time ago—politics certainly had an imprint upon that board. R vs. D. Region—Philadelphia was and still is managed—its public transportation system is affected by people who don't live in Philadelphia. The consequence of that is not necessarily reflective of everything we want to do here, but it's not negative. I don't think the relationship is adversarial as it had been.

And I do think that because a majority of the board are Republicans that it presents an advantage for us to go after money. So when we've had these cost increases, it wouldn't have happened if we didn't have a significant population of Republicans on the board, going to Harrisburg and putting everybody on the spot.

A majority of Pennsylvanians don't have a system like we do, and so the majority of them don't care about public transportation.

So there's benefits and then there's challenges to the design of the board. The other thing I learned is that we really do have a good public transportation system here. It's probably the envy of a lot of cities in the country because of how many modes we have, how effectively they run, and they run pretty efficiently. So you can get around the city with public transportation.

And then the last thing is that we have some pretty dedicated professionals that drive these trains. We have a really good safety record here, which means that the people who are doing it really take seriously what they do, and distinguish themselves by how they work.

...

PP: So sort of in the same vein, the mayor has sort of indirect influence over major transportation projects that affect the city and the region, because of SEPTA and because of PATCO and because of who's making the decisions about funding and all that stuff. So I'm wondering how you would approach a role as mayor when it comes to something like fixing Roosevelt Boulevard or extending the Broad Street Line down to the Navy Yard, things like that.

AW: Relationships that I have in Harrisburg and the federal level mean something to Philadelphia. And I'm the only person in the race who has them. And it has benefited before and it will benefit Philadelphia again, because to do those projects, Philadelphia can't do them by itself. But Pat Toomey, Bob Casey, people I interact with all the time. Barack Obama, when he gave his last State of the Union address, I got invited by Pat Toomey to come listen. Now of course, when he starts talking about the president, I have to leave, but in the meantime there was a lot of things that we had common interest in.

At the state level, as much as people talk to me about schools, I'm a guy who got, in this race, again, the lion's share of funding for public schools, by far, and that came through a Republican-controlled legislature, because I have relationships that help me build consensus so we can resolve things. I'm the guy in this race who has five Council members who have endorsed me publicly, more than anybody else in this race, which indicates that I know how to build consensus.

So all those areas, as it relates to infrastructure, we have to use all those relationships and make the case at all three levels of how we spend our money. We have ideas locally that we talked about, I've talked about, that would allow us to spend more money on roads and potholes, but we're going to need help along with that to also redo all the streets in Philadelphia, not at a snail's pace but at a modern city's pace.

PP: At the local level, people sometimes scoff at the conversations about bike lanes and other street infrastructure—

AW: [Laughs]

PP: For somewhat understandable reasons because it seems sometimes

AW: Are you a biker?

PP: Sometimes.

AW: I'm going to ask you what type of biker you are in a second, but go ahead.

PP: It's seen as an issue that's sort of important to the new folks coming in and not as much to the people who've lived here a long time, and do you think that's the case?

AW: No. And I know why, and they're catching up to us. Most of these bike lanes were developed in a way that, neighborhoods were like, "How does it help me?" It wasn't clear. Most of the bikers that you saw initially were people who looked like they were stereotyped in a certain space. And some of them were pretty rude, I'll just say that. And irritating as they rode around the city. Privileged, if you will. But anyway.

But the reality is, in this economy, there are a lot of people who depend upon bikes because they don't have any money, and we're getting to the point where—bike share, is that the name of the program?—where they're putting out the bikes in the neighborhoods for people who need to use the bikes. If we're honest about what challenges they may face in that regard, then we can protect them. They'll become a huge success. And if we can get people to follow bike rules and provide safety around it, I think it will be a tremendous success in Philadelphia.

And I'm not one who rides a bike, even though everybody else lied about how they ride bikes [at a recent mayoral forum]—the person who said they ride bikes got in a car that night, and I was like, "Wow."

But anyway, I do think that they have an ability to be, I wouldn't say a game-changer, but a culture-changer. So I do think that.

PP: And do you think that—I don't know how far you want to wade into this political level of it—but there's been sort of a back and forth about whether the Mayor's Office of Transportation and Utilities and the Streets Department should be making decisions about where bike lanes go, or whether Council people should be making decisions about where bike lanes go. Who do you think should be in charge of decisions like that that affect the street infrastructure.

AW: People who live in those communities should be partnering with those who know how to design them. So I think what people don't necessarily appreciate is that citizens interact with government—come out your door: cops, streets, schools, everyday we're interacting. Government operates vertically. We're a school, that's all we do, there's no relation—we have to design a couple things. One, new technology, so all these departments can stop competing for information, and redesign these departments so they're not competing against one another and how they communicate to constituents is collective as opposed to siloed.

That means you go to a community about a bike lane or anything else that you're developing, that entity ... arrives with a complete understanding of what the government is doing, why they're doing it, they don't have to check back with somebody else about that process. So that the citizens are not frustrated by the lack of knowledge or expanse of information.

The other part, it allows them to make a true input that's valued and used, so that when it arises—we never get a hundred percent of anything, so I don't expect that any of this stuff is going to go into a neighborhood and 100 percent of people are going to agree. That's not. But if you get 80 percent, 75 percent, that's a pretty good number to work off to say, "Here's what we're gonna do and here's why we're gonna do it." We have to design it in a way that relates to where people are. If they have one night community meeting, they're not going to have ten community meetings that people are going to come out to. Not everybody. So the Administration has to come prepared with all the facts as it relates to whatever the change is gonna be, immediately and prospectively, in terms of how it works.

So I think those we actually do accomplish. So it doesn't require executives sitting downtown, council vs. the mayor, it requires the administration and those departments, bureaucracy, routine connections with communities, and those are the real decision-makers, more so than the mayor and council.

PP: OK. How much time do we have left. A few minutes. So just for a minutes, let's talk about something that's a little closer to the mayor's control, potentially. I know you've had some thoughts about L&I. And L&I has been sort of in and out of the news for—

AW: The whipping boy, if you will.

PP: —for all the wrong reasons in the past few years, past few decades, probably. And I'm wondering what you think needs to happen there.

AW: We have to do a significant amendment. We talk about using technology, but the eCLIPSE program doesn't appear to be rolling out the way that people were anticipating. I'm not sure who designs this stuff and I'm not sure how it happens, but clearly we have a number of entities in this region who'd love to come in and start even pilot, without costing us anything, efficiencies within their departments. So the first thing is, this technology has to go and get the permit.

There's no reason today, in 2015, you have to go to L&I and wait in line. That doesn't make any sense. You have a doctor's appointment, you have an Apple phone appointment, there should be an appointment process driven by technology so that your arrival—you have a window of time, 20 minutes, whatever it is. You have to have all, or if not, the majority of people, housed at L&I. You shouldn't have to walk around City Hall trying to figure out where to go; it should all be housed at—and the person on the side of the ledger should be trained, because they're as frustrated as everybody else. L&I gets beat up a lot, but the other person on the other side of the table is trying their best with limited training and limited skills and resources.

We have to arm them with appropriate training. A lot of them have technology making them much more efficient and effective, so that the experience between the two people is about understanding where you're trying to go, and really trying to help you, as most people would if they weren't just bogged down in crap.

So technology. A redesign of the departments. Strong managing director in Philadelphia needs to be in place that actually redesigns these departments. L&I is obviously the first one to start with, but also to give the confidence back to those who—L&I, 60 percent of what it does is around safety. Those inspectors clearly need to be certified, and that requires us to give them the money so they can do that. Which means we have to do other things which are connected: fix our pension obligations so that a third of our budget no longer goes toward pension costs, and it can go to things like L&I, schools, and streets. I think those things we can do to improve L&I.

PP: And do you think—there's been a couple different proposals floated around about how to restructure it and so forth—but do you think that having one agency that deals with both expediting the business permitting process and stuff like that, and the other side of it is obviously public safety—do you think that it makes sense to have one organization taking care of both of those?

AW: I couldn't tell you that yet, because I haven't gotten that close to it to have an objective opinion. At first blush, no, but there may be a reason why it's that way and I don't know it, so I have to get a little bit more information about that.

PP: Sure. You touched on this a few minutes ago. The Nutter Administration has tried to bring a new level of professionalism to the Planning Commission, and given it a bigger mandate, and given it more control over some of the development things that happen. Do you think that's the right direction for things to go?

AW: With the addition of my suggestion that was tools to make it more efficient and an appropriate balance of what people feel in communities that really reflects what they believe. The first thing is, at this point in time, we still have that neighborhood tension of gentrification. That's a hurdle from planning. So I have a vision—who am I doing that with? Am I doing that with universities? The next generation that's gonna be here? People who live here? I'm not quite sure how that works currently, and because it's not trust there's going to be limits on how you can ideally plan for a city and its vision for the future. So we have to house in that component, who's going to break through the limitations of what neighborhoods we want to see.

We have parts of Philadelphia where—you mentioned one—where neighbors don't want new developments to go above a certain height, and it's like, who's arguing? I don't have necessarily a dog in that fight, but I do have an understanding that for whatever reason the people that live there don't—well, the developers want to build—

PP: As high as they want to build.

AW: Right. It makes them more money. If we could figure out a way to build something higher than Billy Penn in Philadelphia, we should find a way to be able to do that with housing. It has to be win-win. And of course I'm not there, but I'm clear that affects what you're talking about in terms of planning.

PP: I mean, who's making decisions about the future? Do you think the Planning Commission is doing a good job of navigating that decision-making process?

AW: I think they're confronted with building, designing, and flying the plane at the same time. And that's just not the best situation. But it's ambitious, which I think is good. It's visionary, which I think is good. They have other assets and resources to add onto it to make it effective. And so me saying it's good or bad is unfair, it's an incomplete grade. So the consequence is that execution has yet to be seen, and we have a lot more stuff to do.

PP: The last thing that I wanted to ask you, and this is sort of a more general question ... the neighborhoods in the city that are struggling and frankly suffering the most, what do you think they need most from the government, from City Hall specifically?

AW: An opportunity to go to work. And build their economy. So the stuff I mentioned before, abatement programs for neighborhoods, a public bank that would—because right now if you

decide to move the abatement, business opens up, a secondary business opens up, how do they capitalize that business to grow efficiently? Public bank, the city's own bank. Lending levels of a million and below as opposed to what big banks want, a million and above, we compete in our own space, support small businesses, we're going to get huge turnover value. We've had some historic businesses in the neighborhoods that can't grow because they don't have money, so we want to put people to work.

That allows also people who are re-entering into society. The truth is, this debate about records expungement may happen, but I don't think it's going to happen in the next two or three years. In the meantime, somebody's coming home, they want to work and they don't want to break the law: allow them to start their own business. And I think if we're smart about educating people about how to hold onto their houses, the equity in their properties, you will see neighborhoods growing and flourishing with people who live there, who are indigenous to those communities, because they'll know the resources that are available.

They'll be more educated about the decisions they're making. They'll be supported by the administration. Those things are doable and designable within the next administration.