



Restoring Protections to Rittenhouse Row Lost in the 2012 Zoning Code



Photo by Mark Stanley courtesy of Center City District

A Zoning Proposal prepared by Center City Residents Association for the Vicinity of
Walnut, Chestnut & Sansom Streets from 15th to 20th
3 December 2020/ Updated 1/7/2022



CCRA recognizes the vital role which redevelopment plays in the economic health and vibrancy of the City and we have regularly supported large scale projects throughout our neighborhood. But we seek a better balance in this proposal between increased density and the fragile fabric of what is already in place.

RITTENHOUSE ROW

Every city has one - an area with the highest retail rents, densest foot traffic and most concentrated mix of high end consumer goods and services. In New York it's 5th Avenue. In LA, it's Rodeo Drive. In Philadelphia, it's Rittenhouse Row - Chestnut, Walnut, and Sansom Streets from 15th to 20th Street.

These blocks of Chestnut, Walnut and Sansom are pedestrian scale [pages 3, 4 and 5]. To the north, towers march down Market, JFK and Arch [page 6]. These buildings, constructed by and for large corporations, were designed to impress and to impose. By contrast, the townhouse shops interspersed on Walnut, Chestnut and Sansom were built on a human scale to invite. The streets on Rittenhouse Row integrate with "one of Philadelphia's greatest assets", Rittenhouse Square, the community's "center" in the words of urbanologist Jane Jacobs. CCRA believes that the City should protect the eclectic assemblage of Rittenhouse Row while permitting taller and denser development to the north.

ADDRESSING THE LOSS OF RITTENHOUSE ROW PROTECTIONS

When Rittenhouse Row was zoned in 1988, specific height and massing controls were implemented to reduce the possibility of inappropriately massive buildings. However, when the code was rewritten in 2012, these controls became optional and now, the alternative "Skyplane Regulations" allow the construction of much taller and bulkier CMX-5 buildings. The current zoning allows for wall to wall density. It designates four solid blocks of CMX 5, which is the city's densest form of high-rise zoning [page 7]. The effect of CMX-5 can be seen on Market, JFK and Arch Streets. CMX-5 is inappropriate for the Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District and the nationally registered Center City West Commercial Historic District without the sensible restrictions from the earlier code [Page 6]. To discover what the current zoning allows for Rittenhouse Rows' distinctive townhouse shops, look no further than the controversial Jeweler's Row development approved for construction with CMX-5 zoning [page 12]. What would Walnut Street look like if built out to the current map? [pages 10 and 11].

DEVELOPMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Things have changed since the Spring of 2020 and it is hard to predict where cities are headed in the next decade. But cities are resilient, and many of Philadelphia's recent adaptations (sidewalk dining, street closures, pop-up shops, and working from home) all point towards a return to active street life dependent on diversity and pedestrian scale.

CCRA'S PLAN: REESTABLISH APPROPRIATE CONTROLS

Center City Residents Association supports sensible growth in appropriate areas but the current zoning map could eliminate Rittenhouse Row as we know it. CCRA proposes retaining the Row via the common sense proposals detailed on page 13 which include:

- Zoning Revisions
- Setbacks and Height Limits for Sansom Street
- Building Frontage Maximums

THE ROW'S MOJO | CHESTNUT STREET



1500 block of Chestnut Street

- Pedestrian scale
- Mix of high & low buildings
- Eclectic & historic



1600 block of Chestnut Street

THE ROW'S MOJO | SANSOM STREET



1500 block of Sansom Street



1600 block of Sansom Street

- Pedestrian scale
- Narrow building frontages
- Eclectic & historic

THE ROW'S MOJO | WALNUT STREET



1600 block of Walnut Street

- Pedestrian scale
- Mix of high & low buildings
- Eclectic & historic



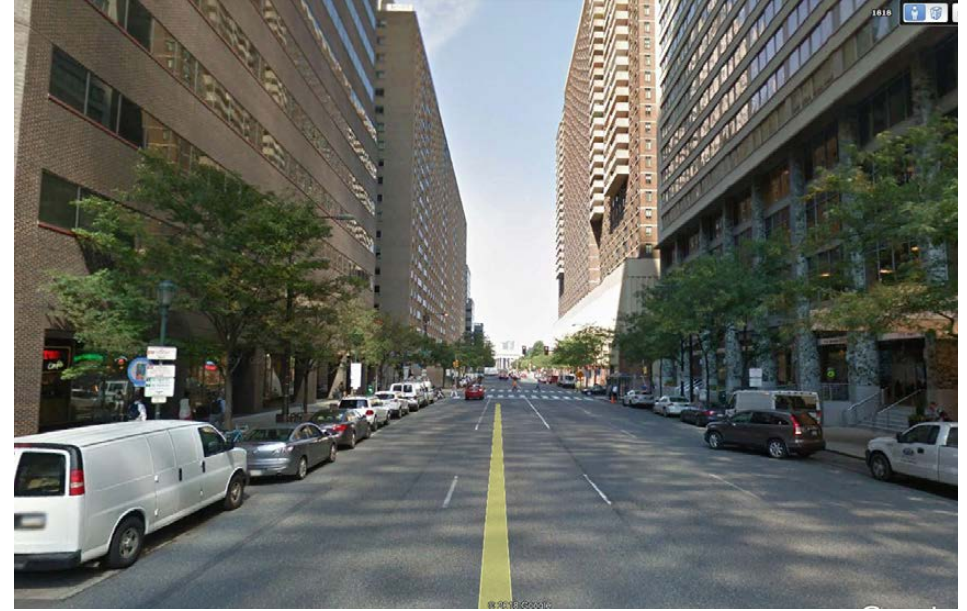
1500 block of Walnut Street

THE ALTERNATIVE | CMX-5



Market Street

- Pedestrian scale
- Mix of high & low buildings
- Eclectic & historic architecture

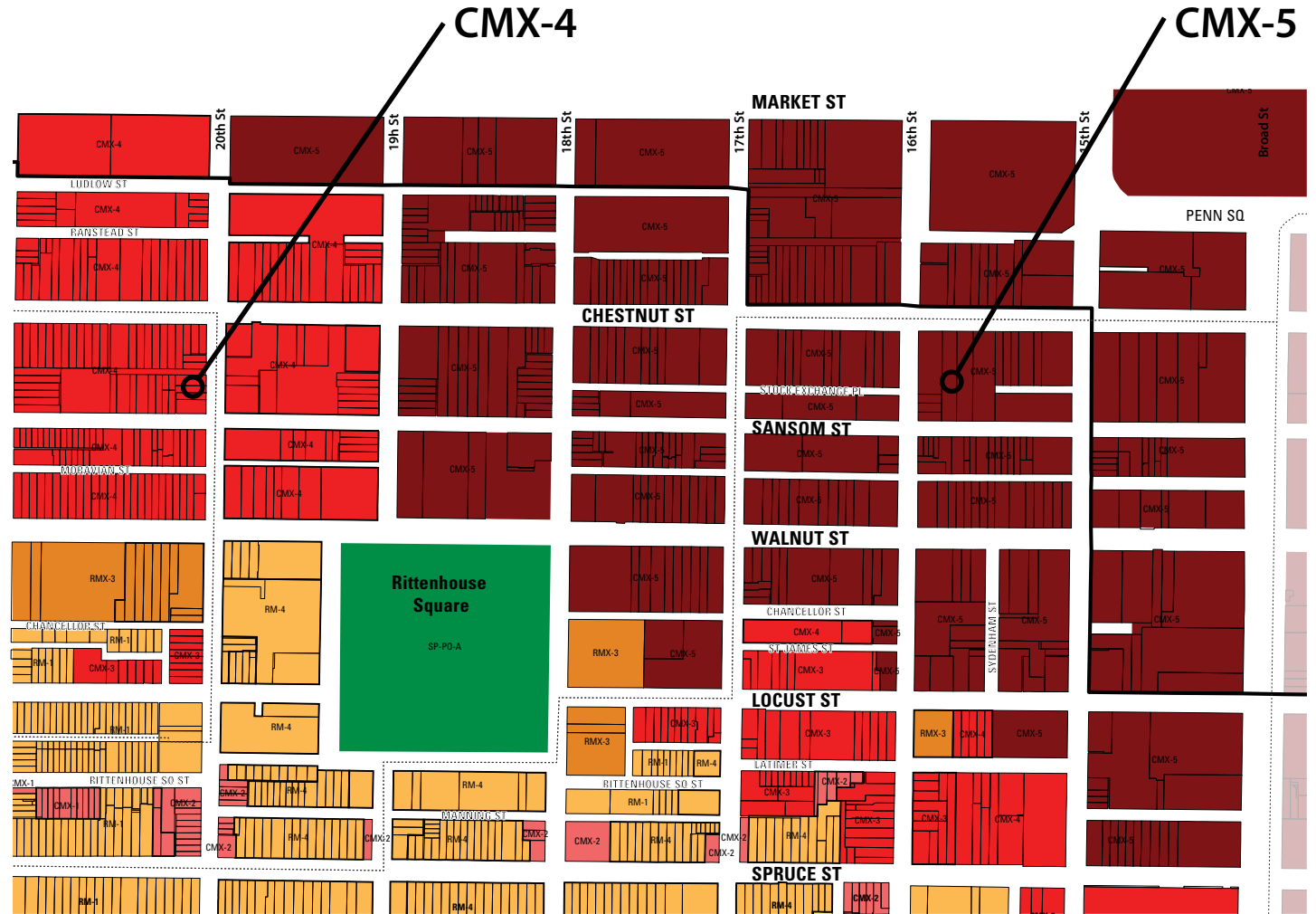


JFK Boulevard

- Automobile scale
- All tall buildings
- Monotonous architecture

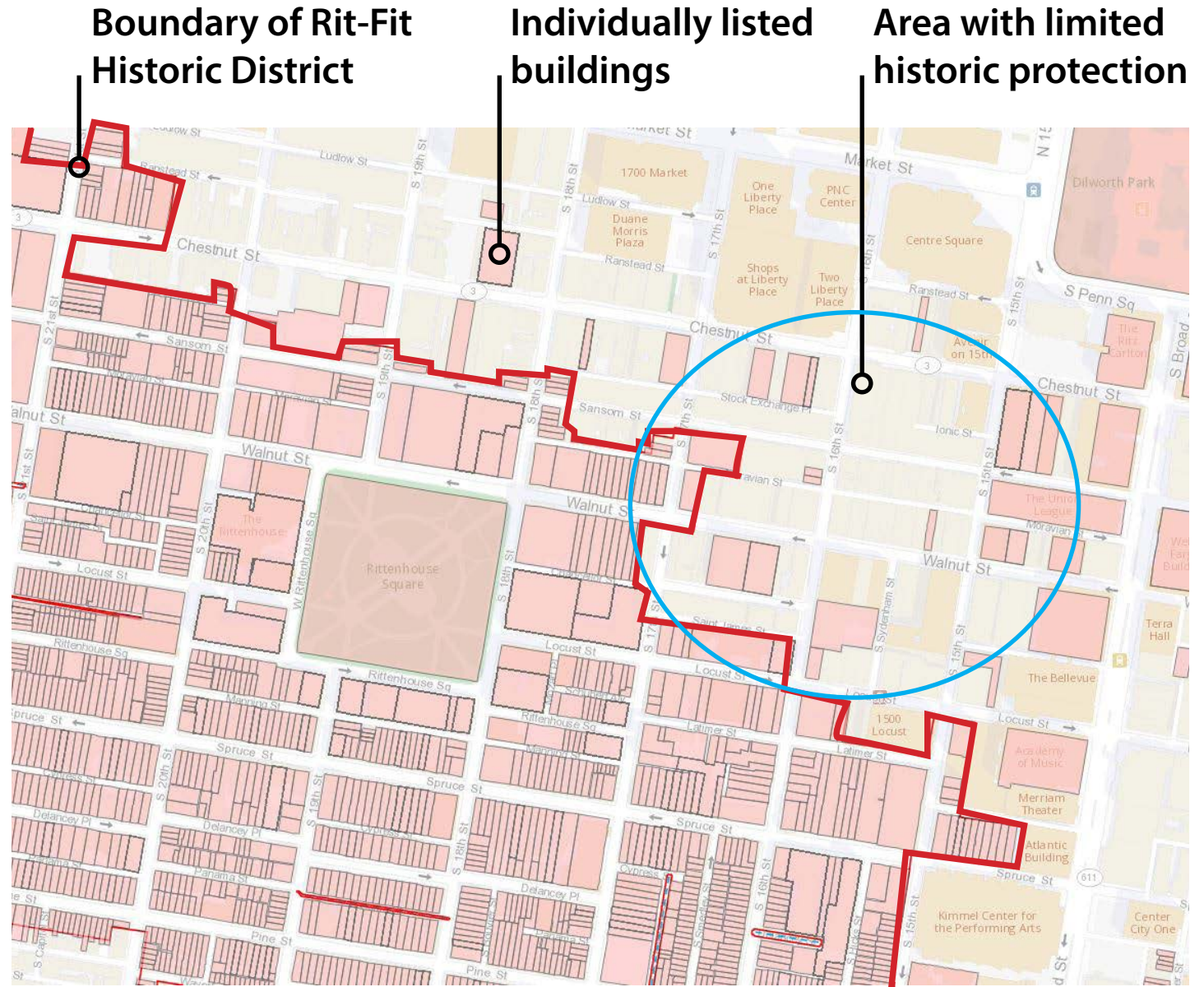
CURRENT ZONING MAP OF RITTENHOUSE ROW

Highest zoning classifications allow for disproportionate height and density on narrow shopping and dining streets.



LIMITED HISTORIC PROTECTION

Outside of the Rittenhouse Fidler Historic District there are very few protected buildings.



LIMITED HISTORIC PROTECTION

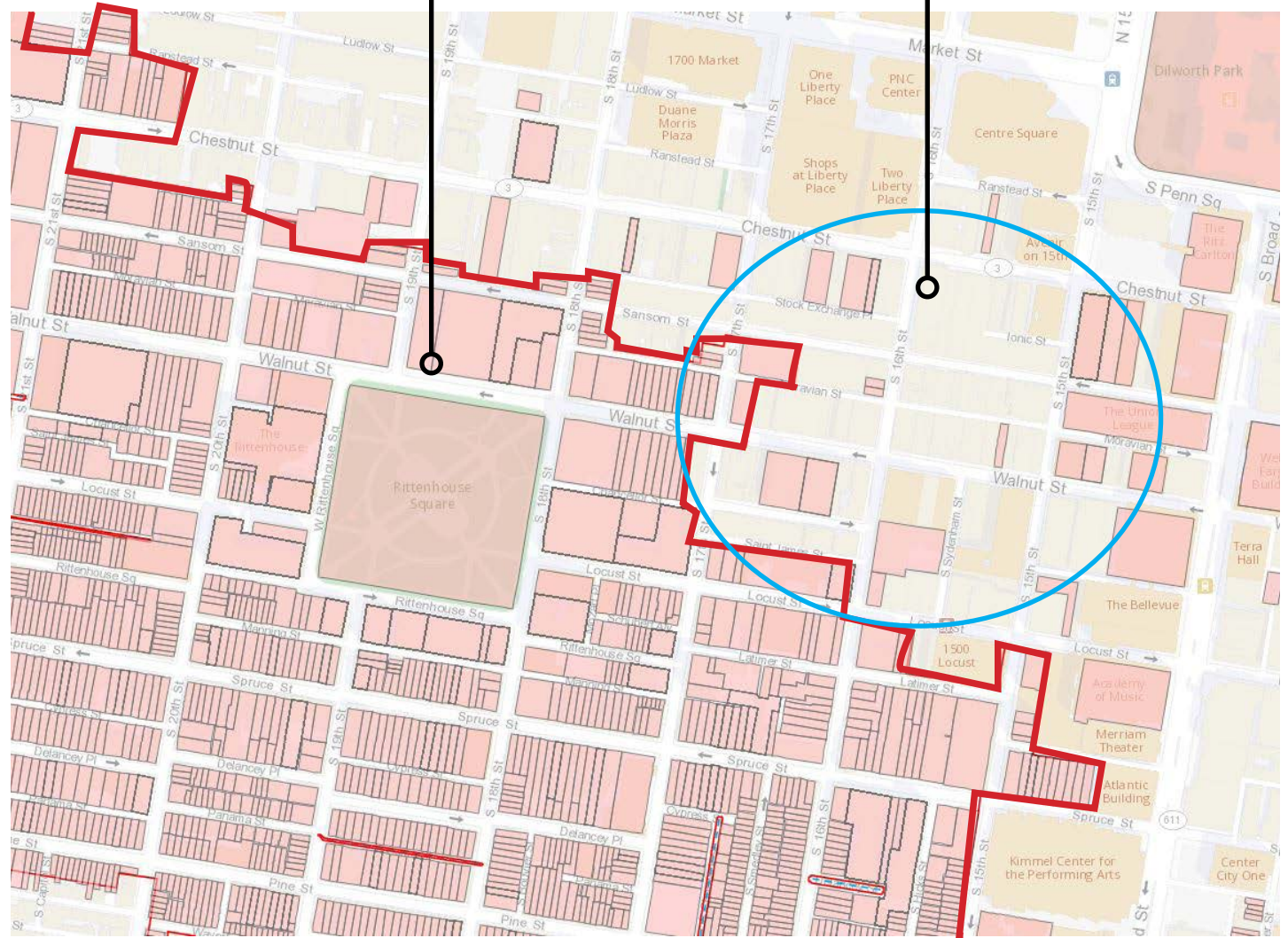
There are only 4 protected buildings on the 1500 and 1600 blocks of Walnut Street.

Even though they are in a National Historic District, they have no protection against demolition unless they are also listed on the local register.

Note that the CCRA Historic Preservation Committee has listed additional properties in the last 2 years.

**Rittenhouse-Fitler
Historic District
(local)**

**Center City West
Commercial Historic
District (national)**



WHAT THE CURRENT ZONING ALLOWS

Aerial view of 1500 - 1700 blocks of Walnut Street



Existing Conditions



Estimated Maximum Zoning Density by Right

WHAT THE CURRENT ZONING ALLOWS

Street view of 1500 block of Walnut Street



Existing Conditions



Estimated Maximum Zoning Density by Right

LIMITED HISTORIC PROTECTION & MAXIMUM ZONING ALLOWED

Where is the next
Jeweler's Row?



Jeweler's Row Building Presented at Civic Design Review

CCRA ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RITTENHOUSE ROW

The CCRA is proposing revisions to the zoning code as it applies to the areas where we have concerns for over-development

1. THE SKYPLANE LACKS BUILDING FRONTAGE MAXIMUMS

THE PROBLEM:

The Skyplane provisions found at 14-701 (5)(b) do not prescribe maximum widths for lot frontages such as those found in the Option B bulk and massing controls (see 14-701 (5)(c)(.4) and (.6)) (100 foot maximum lot widths for corner lots and 60 foot lot widths for interior lots on Chestnut and Walnut). Consequently, the frontage of a sky plane compliant building could occupy an entire block.

CCRA RECOMMENDATION:

Add maximum lot widths to the Skyplane provisions at 14 - 701 (5)(b) to match the locations of the same provision included in Option B.

2. SANSOM STREET AND THE NORTH SIDE OF CHESTNUT HAVE NO LOT WIDTH CONTROLS

THE PROBLEM:

The only controls for Sansom Street and the north side of Chestnut Street (14-701 (5)(c)(.5)) limit building heights to 320 feet and do not limit lot width controls; whereas, on the south side of Chestnut Street and both sides of Walnut street the code limits lots to 100 feet wide on corner lots and 60 feet wide on interior lots. All of Chestnut should be protected not just the south side. In addition, Sansom street is narrower than either Walnut or Chestnut, and should also be protected from bulky buildings.

CCRA RECOMMENDATION:

Incorporate the same lot width maximums on the North side of Chestnut Street and on the North and South side of Sansom Street as applies to the south side of Chestnut Street and both sides of Walnut Street.

3. THE SANSOM STREET HEIGHT LIMIT SHOULD BE REDUCED AND THERE ARE NO STEP BACK REGULATIONS

THE PROBLEM:

The zoning code does not apply any set backs on Sansom Street whereas setbacks apply to the south sides of Chestnut and Walnut Streets (14-701 (5)(c)(.4) and (.6)). Sansom Street is narrower than either Walnut or Chestnut, yet buildings could potentially be built straight to the full 320 foot height limit.

CCRA RECOMMENDATION:

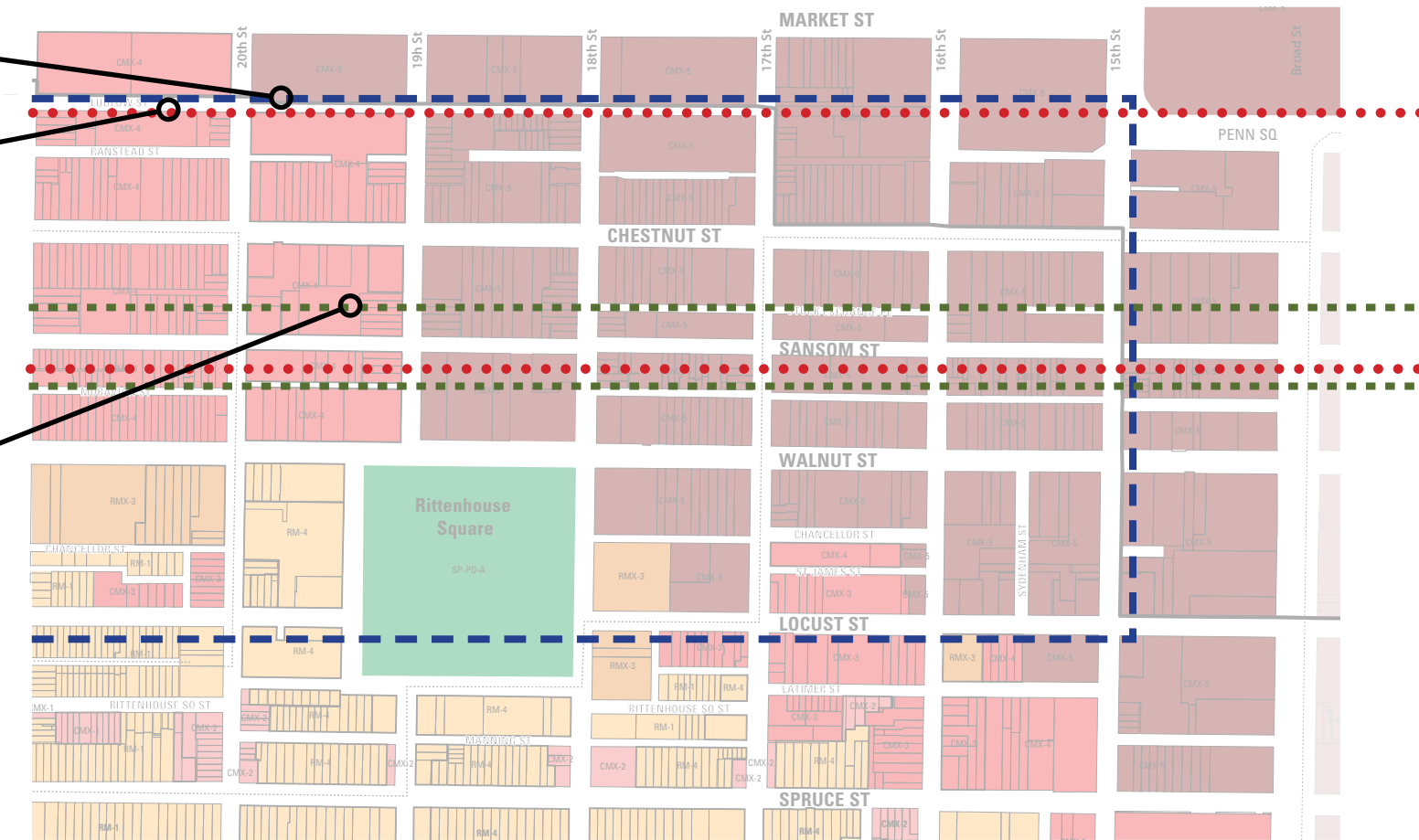
Apply the setback regulations found in 14 -701 (5) (c)(.4) and (.6) to the south side of Sansom Street and lower the maximum building height from 320 feet to 280 feet.

CCRA ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RITTENHOUSE ROW

1. Apply building frontage limits when using Skyplane on Walnut, Chestnut & Locust Streets

2. Incorporate building frontage limits on the north side of Chestnut Street and both sides of Sansom Street

3. Apply setback regulations and reduce the height limit on Sansom Street



CCRA|BIA JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RITTENHOUSE ROW

CCRA Remapping Committee has negotiated with the Building Industry Association (BIA) to modify the earlier Ordinance:

City of Philadelphia

BILL NO. 200118 continued

No change

(b) Option A: Sky Plane Controls.

The bulk and massing provisions of this § 14-701(5)(b) apply to any lot frontage facing a street 50 ft. or more in width, except for lots that are located across a street from a public park and where the distance from the lot frontage to the furthest boundary of the public park is greater than 200 ft. The street width shall be the width of the right-of-way as confirmed on the City Plan of streets.

* * *

(.2) Chestnut Street and Walnut Street Regulations

The maximum width of a building frontage located along Walnut Street or Chestnut Street shall be 100 ft. for corner lots and 60 ft. for intermediate lots.

No change

(c) Option B: Open Area, Building Width, Spacing, Height Controls.

(.1) Open Area Above Ground Level.

The following standards apply to all CMX-4 and CMX-5 [lots.] lots, except for lots with frontage on Sansom Street. All height measurements shall include mechanical space:

* * *

(.5) Sansom Street Regulations.

[The maximum building height for lots fronting on Sansom Street between Front Street and the Schuylkill River, except within 130 ft. east of the east side of Broad Street or within 130 ft. west of the west side of Broad Street, shall be 320 ft.]

The following standards apply to lots with frontage on Sansom Street between Front Street and the Schuylkill River, except within 130 ft. east of the east side of Broad Street or within 130 ft. west of the west side of Broad Street.

(.a) *The maximum building height shall be 320 ft. including mechanical space.*

(.b) *The maximum width of a building frontage along Sansom Street shall be 100 ft.*

for corner lots and 60 ft. for intermediate lots

City of Philadelphia

BILL NO. 200118 continued

~~(.c) The maximum lot coverage of buildings for the first 45 ft. of building height shall be 100%.~~

~~(.d) The maximum lot coverage for portions of buildings above 45 ft. and up to 85 ft. in height shall be 75% of the lot.~~

~~(.e) The maximum lot coverage for portions of buildings above 85 ft. and up to 200 ft. in height shall be 50% of the lot.~~

~~(.f) The maximum lot coverage for portions of buildings above 200 ft. in height shall be 30% of the lot.~~

(.c) The maximum building height at the street line shall be 55 ft.

(d.) Buildings shall step back 10 ft. from the Sansom Street street line above 55 ft.

CCRA|BIA JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RITTENHOUSE ROW

Current Status and Next Steps:

- CCRA submitted request to PCPC to revise the Ordinance
- CCRA contacted neighboring RCO's to re-confirm their support
- CCRA working with three affected City Council Districts to gain support
- CCRA no longer requesting down-zoning of Rittenhouse Row area