



## Public Finance Alternatives Regional Forum Held in Philadelphia

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Public Finance Alternatives, A Philadelphia Regional Forum, was held on Thursday, January 29 at the Arch Street Friends Meeting House Conference Center in Philadelphia. Featuring six speakers and co-sponsored by thirty governmental and non-profit organizations, the Forum was organized by Alanna Hartzok, State Coordinator of the Pennsylvania Fair Tax Coalition with assistance from Joshua Vincent of the Center for the Study of Economics. Other members of the PFTC and Common Ground, USA who played important supporting roles were Richard Biddle, Judy Douty, Joan Sage, Mike Curtis, Artie Yeatman, Ed Dodson, Jake Himmelstein, Heather Remoff, Hanno Beck, and Cameron Kelly.

The main purpose of the Forum was to educate citizens and public officials in Philadelphia and the surrounding region about the shift to land value taxation now proceeding in sixteen Pennsylvania cities and to compare this to other reform proposals such as homestead ex-



emptions, enterprise zones, and local income or sales taxes. Given the now well-documented positive effects of the land value tax reform policy, sometimes called the "split-rate tax" because of its gradual method of implementation, organizers sensed the time was right to push for its adoption by this major world city.

Philadelphia, recently dubbed "Blighttown, USA" by Philadelphia Weekly journalist Eils Lotozo, was chosen as the Forum venue in light of the following sobering statistics: Philadelphia has more than 700 vacant commercial buildings, 15,800 vacant lots, 27,000 empty houses, and 1500 acres of vacant land and brown fields. North Philadelphia is one of the most distressed areas in the country. HUD now has two major enterprise zones in the city. In recent years millions of dollars of local, state and federal monies have been pouring into the City of Brotherly Love in desperate efforts to stimulate economic revitalization.

Approximately 80 people listened attentively from the benches of the spacious room of the historic Meeting House Conference Center constructed in 1804 by the Religious Society of Friends on an original land grant, dated 1693, from William Penn.

Among the audience were officials from the City of Philadelphia, the City of Lancaster, the Borough of Yeadon, the Pennsylvania Legis-

lature, the Pennsylvania Economy League, the HUD Empowerment Zone, the Pennsylvania 21st Century Environmental Commission of the Department of Environmental Protection, the American Association of Retired Persons, the Pennsylvania School Reform Network, the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, the Education Summit, the Green Party of Pennsylvania, Pacem in Terris, the Democratic Freedom Caucus, School of Living, Health Alternatives International, and the United Nations NGO Representative for the Society of Friends.

Six Forum speakers addressed the following questions:

\* What are the economic development and environmental impacts of the shift to land value taxation?

\* Could this local tax reform promote home ownership and affordable housing in the Philadelphia Area?

\* How might this policy affect homeowners? Renters? Landlords? Industrial and commercial property owners?

\* Exactly how has this local tax reform been implemented?

\* Is this policy compatible with other tax reform options?

Press coverage was substantial with reporters from the Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Weekly, Philadelphia Daily News, and The Times Herald of nearby Norristown.

The Philadelphia Inquirer story