

At a Glance

Major
Sociology

Immediate Post-Grad Pursuits

- Drafting resumes for homeless men searching for employment
- Advocacy for low-income housing at state and local levels

Continuing Education

- MBA in Real Estate from Wharton School, UPenn

Current Title

Economic Development Director

Employer

Philadelphia Empowerment Zone

Fields of study that are useful for nonprofit work

- Growth and Structure of Cities
- Economics

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Revitalizing Philly Renewing the city's commercial corridors with Andrew Frishkoff '88

When SEPTA unveils its refurbished historic trolley route along Girard Avenue this fall, Andrew Frishkoff will beam with pride. And for good reason; his organization provided seed funding for community improvements that complement the project.



Frishkoff works for the Philadelphia Empowerment Zone (EZ), a federal tax-incentive initiative designed to revitalize distressed urban areas, particularly in North and West Philly. Like other EZs nationwide, it does this by offering tax credits to local businesses that hire local workers.

But a decade after the EZ's creation, its initial \$100 million federal grant is almost gone. Frishkoff's job as Economic Development Director involves identifying new sources of funding for renewal projects. Thanks to a recently designed program, Frishkoff and his co-workers can offer potential investors better tax credits than were originally possible. "If you can reduce investors' tax liability," Frishkoff explains, "they will be more likely to put money into struggling communities."

Although many of Frishkoff's responsibilities involve keeping a finger on the pulse of EZ's financial health, it was his interest in poverty relief that inspired him to enter the non-profit realm.

A sociology major, Frishkoff came to Haverford with a "save the world complex" that he began acting on during his senior year by assisting homeless men with drafting resumes. Eager to empower more low-income people, he took a job with ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now immediately after graduation. Frishkoff later pursued his interest in advocacy for affordable housing at the state level.

"But having been removed from the hands-on work when doing policy, I wanted to get back to more direct field work," Frishkoff says. Earning his MBA in Real Estate at Wharton refocused his career path. He adds with a chuckle that it has also reminded him to keep an eye on his own financial status as he works to repay his student loans. After years of collaborating with Philly government officials, Frishkoff finally has the opportunity to combine some of his favorite aspects of previous jobs in his position at the Empowerment Zone. "My nose was to the window," he says. "This is the first I've been inside."

But this vantage point comes with a price. The EZ faces the daily challenge of working with many separate interest groups that do not always collaborate as well as they should, Frishkoff says. "A lot depends more on individual groups making an effort, as opposed to a broad governmental policy," he admits.

Even so, the EZ is in a unique position to encourage this relationship. Frishkoff describes the EZ as being the glue that brings city agencies together in the neighborhoods where it works, as it is currently doing with the Girard Coalition. Recognizing SEPTA's decision to refurbish the trolley line as an opportunity to revitalize Girard Avenue, the EZ expanded the scope of the project and is now working to renew the once-major commercial corridor that has since deteriorated.

"We aren't solely responsible, but we get to watch something emerge from the ground-up," Frishkoff says as he smiles and traces on a Philly map the path of renewal – a path that his work has helped to make possible.