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## City mortgages the future

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Richard Jaffe](#)

The **University City Science Center** is facing an unprecedented but very real threat to its future as a powerful engine of innovation, job creation, and community development in and beyond Philadelphia.

Since its inception in 1963, Science Center graduate companies have created 15,000 permanent jobs in the region (including more than 5,000 in the city) that contribute more than \$9 billion annually to the regional economy. Nonetheless, the Science Center finds itself at risk. Surprisingly, the threat comes from the **Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority** (RDA) — a longtime collaborator with the Science Center.

In 1965, the Science Center purchased 25 parcels of land along Market Street in West Philadelphia, for the purpose of redeveloping the properties in accordance with a city-approved urban renewal plan. Since then, the Science Center has led the development of what is now a thriving 15-building campus that includes 2.0 million square feet of state-of-the-art laboratory, office and medical facilities. Its newest building, 3711 Market St., was completed in 2008 and is home to 17 companies.

Only a few vacant parcels remain on the Science Center campus. **The Science Center** continues to actively market these sites; but its efforts have been hampered by the global financial meltdown and its impact on commercial real estate. The RDA is attempting to seize these parcels, under the banner of cracking down on slow-moving developers. This move is bad business and even worse public policy. It has forced the Science Center to file suit against the RDA to protect the integrity of its campus and continue the implementation of its strategy.

The Science Center is in the midst of a thoughtful, long-term strategic plan to build a cohesive campus — featuring both recognized centers of excellence (including Penn, Drexel and CHOP) and innovative companies — that will support its vision for economic growth and job creation.

The RDA and the Science Center have worked collaboratively since 1965 without resorting to the judicial system. The Science Center has tried for the past two years to renegotiate its agreement with the RDA, seeking a reasonable extension of our

construction schedule due to the current economic realities. Yet the RDA has refused to cooperate.

The Science Center has made a 47-year investment in the city. Forcing it effectively out of the development business, by allowing the RDA to take over the parcels in question, could cost the city and the region thousands of new high-paying jobs and millions in new revenues.

Commercial development in Philadelphia should encourage sustained business development and job growth. Shortsighted, irresponsible land grabs fail to promote those objectives and will foreclose on our future.

*Richard P. Jaffe is the chairman of the Science Center's Board of Directors and is writing on behalf of the entire board.*

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