

# Wake-Up Call: Climate Crisis Comes to Center City

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

On the evening of Wednesday, September 1, many of us got emergency alerts on our phones warning that Hurricane Ida was bringing tornadoes, high winds, and flooding to the Philadelphia area. Rain was already pouring down in buckets.

In my apartment lobby, one of my neighbors was trying to take her dog for a walk, but he didn't want to go out in the rain. Another neighbor was worried about tornadoes, and texted me to ask if she should shelter in the basement of our building. I told her no: KYW news radio reported that the tornadoes were not coming to Center City.

As it turned out, the Schuylkill River had overflowed its banks onto residential streets. Going down to the basement for shelter would not have been a smart move.

Pictures were posted on Twitter, including one ironic photo by KYW news anchor Denise Nakano, of flooding in front of a building at 24th and Chestnut, with a mural of the Schuylkill River on it. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* published staff writer Diane Mastrull's photo of Center City artist Ed Bronstein walking his dog near the flooded dog run at Schuylkill River Park.

Two Center City residents sent me emails describing their walks. "At 8 a.m.," Nancy Dilcher reported, "I walked on Sansom Street from 21st to 23rd Street towards the Schuylkill River. The water had reached 24th St. All cars at the parking lot between 24th and 25th St. were under water. It was shocking to see how the Schuylkill River had expanded out of its banks so quickly."

"This morning, after marveling at the canal that was once the Vine Street Expressway," Nancy Heller wrote, "I tried to walk over and see how Schuylkill River Park had fared, but of course I couldn't get anywhere near it. Thought I'd stop in at the new Giant [supermarket at 23rd and Arch], but couldn't get there either; saw that Trader Joe's parking lot was blocked off but was able to sneak in anyway... (We were out of lemons—hardly an emergency, but it felt good to do something semi-normal.) Once again, I feel very lucky, but what a weird night/day! The weather's so lovely, today, it seems almost immoral to enjoy it..."

All day, the Rittenhouse Square area was serene, sunny, and cool. I ran into tour director Ellen Kay Coleman, who had arrived at Philadelphia airport during the storm after circling for an hour—and was glad to be alive.

On Facebook, a man reported that he was trapped in his apartment because the basement was flooded and the elevators were out of service. Many dogs did not get walked.

I encountered people who thought the flood was a bizarre scenario and were shocked it could happen. It seems they haven't been keeping up with climate-crisis reporting; in an article in the [Winter 2019](#) issue of this publication, I offered this grim prospect: "One day you may find yourself sitting on the Broad Street beach, listening to your short-wave radio, snacking on insects, and holding a one-way ticket on the last flight to Antarctica."

In the meantime, you are advised to stock up on bottled water, canned and packaged food that doesn't require cooking, a battery-powered radio, flashlights, lamps, and other emergency equipment for sheltering in place during power outages or other emergencies. Check out Red Cross Ready: <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies.html>



A view of the submerged Schuylkill River Trail and Boardwalk from the South Street Bridge.

## Deluge Déjà Vu

In 1869, from October 2 to October 4, following two months of drought in the Philadelphia region, five to 10 inches of rain fell, causing the Schuylkill River to drown the Fairmount Dam under more than 11 feet of water and to flood surrounding areas. All water works on the Schuylkill, which supplied the area's drinking water, were knocked offline by the flooding. Read the details and see photos here: <https://water.phila.gov/blog/history-150-year-anniversary-schuylkill-flood>

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