



PITTSBURGH  
GREEN SPACE ALLIANCE

October 15, 2013

Councilman William Peduto  
510 City County Building  
414 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

10,000 Friends of  
Pennsylvania

Allegheny Commons  
Initiative, a project  
of NSLC

Bike Pittsburgh

Construction  
Junction

GTECH Strategies

Hollow Oak Land  
Trust

Mount Washington  
Community  
Development  
Corporation

Nine Mile Run  
Watershed  
Association

The Penn State  
Center -- Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh Parks  
Conservancy

Pittsburgh Trails  
Advocacy Group

Tree Pittsburgh

Western  
Pennsylvania  
Conservancy

Dear Councilman Peduto:

As you will recall, last spring the Pittsburgh Greenspace Alliance hosted a Forum for Mayoral Primary Candidates at the Heinz History Center. We were invigorated by the breadth and depth of knowledge the candidates displayed about Pittsburgh's greenspaces. Following on from this success, members of the Greenspace Alliance have drafted individual "white papers" with a short list of proposed policy points for the next Mayoral Administration to consider. We take great pleasure in sharing with you the white papers of 13 organizations.

These organizations are all non-profits engaged in public-private partnership with the City of Pittsburgh by stewarding city-owned land, encouraging the development of best-practice city policy, or helping keep Pittsburgh on the cutting edge of green practices. Together we represent the interests of tens of thousands of Pittsburgh residents and have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in greening projects. While we each approached our white paper from the perspective of our own organization's needs and missions, there are remarkable commonalities that emerge in reading these papers together, from understanding the economic returns that arise out of green investments, to the ability to address multiple layers of problems through greening, to the crucial role these public-private partnerships have played in Pittsburgh's development as a healthy, livable, prosperous and green City.

We offer these recommendations not in the guise of criticism, but as people who have thought deeply about the issues and can envision an even better way forward.

Following, in no particular order, are a few of the key policy recommendations and perceived needs that are echoed throughout these papers:

- 1) Proactively create and implement best practice protocols for maintenance and monitoring of trees, vacant land, and parks.
- 2) Improve data collection, storage, sharing and analysis to help manage greenspaces and demonstrate their benefits.
- 3) Simplify and streamline the contracting process with the City of Pittsburgh for stewardship and project agreements.
- 4) Support large scale green infrastructure projects as core elements of development projects.
- 5) Systematically use the City's land reserve program to strategically acquire sites for green infrastructure and storm-water remediation, to enhance workforce development opportunities, and to promote deconstruction over demolition when structures need to be removed.
- 6) Enforce existing City laws and ordinances, particularly for parks (through a park ranger program), trees (by fully staffing the Department of Public Works Forestry Department), and for pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle safety (by enforcing laws to eliminate speeding and aggressive driving).
- 7) Adopt and implement policies that will result in safe pedestrian and bicycle routes that connect parks, neighborhoods and businesses.
- 8) Stimulate economic development through strategic greenspace protection and development.

We encourage you to dive into the attached white papers to more closely examine these recommendations, and to contact the organizations directly should you want to discuss them in more detail. We hope that as you read these papers, you find yourself, as we are, truly grateful that we live in this great city; so full of talented, passionate and dedicated people who have committed to partnering with the City of Pittsburgh to complete truly amazing projects and programs.

We will be in touch to request a meeting to discuss these recommendations further.

Yours faithfully,

Pittsburgh Greenspace Alliance

encs. 13 Green Space Oriented White Papers



## **Linking Land Use and Storm-Water Remediation**

### **Strategically Link Land Use Decisions and Infrastructure Investments**

Storm-water remediation and addressing the region's combined sewer overflow problem is one of the most critical and costly issues facing the City of Pittsburgh and its neighbors. Likewise, remediating blighted and abandoned land is on top of the list of concerns of many residents and neighborhood business owners. Combined together, open space preservation and strategic use of abandoned land can provide substantial storm-water remediation benefits for the City of Pittsburgh and serve as a primary component of repurposing long abandoned liabilities by turning them into green infrastructure assets.

Urban water management is a critical issue facing communities across the country, and not just in Pittsburgh. Poor water quality is a threat to a municipality's public health and economic sustainability. Our ability to manage water assets, especially as we confront climate change, is essential for coastal and inland communities alike. Land use planning and land use decisions are a central component of municipality's responsibilities. Using land to its highest and best use provides a municipality with the opportunity to increase revenue generation, help property owners build wealth, and improve the health and well-being of its residents. Connecting the two issues together provides an opportunity to encourage innovation and solve common problems.

Establishing the governance and management structure that combines the remediation of storm-water, responsible water management and the repurposing of vacant and abandoned lands should be a top priority for the next Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh. The new administration will need to continue to 'unravel' aging infrastructure and real estate management systems, while creating new paradigms that improve the disposition of water and land use assets.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Below are five recommendations to assist in the productive use of vacant lands and opens space related to storm-water remediation and water asset protection.

- 1) Build on existing land use plans by developing a comprehensive and strategic approach to vacant land management, open space preservation and parkland management by identifying and targeting acquisition or protection of specific open space sites that provide significant storm-water remediation benefits.
- 2) Expand the use of the City's Land Reserve Program, which has typically been used by community development corporations to recycle tax delinquent real estate, into a strategic site acquisition tool for green infrastructure and storm-water remediation projects.
- 3) The City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County can serve as a model municipal partnership by leading the formation of a regional storm-water utility.

- 4) Develop a system of conservation finance that underwrites the strategic acquisition and protection of land assets for green infrastructure purposes; and construction of water quality and storm-water mitigation projects.
- 5) Establish and adhere to a system of metrics that demonstrate the benefits of parks, open space and land recycling efforts for residents and visitors to the City of Pittsburgh.

#### **Forming a Storm-Water Utility: A Timely Opportunity**

In 2013, the state of Pennsylvania enacted legislation that clarifies the ability for municipalities to create storm-water utilities (Senate Bill 351 of 2013). Municipalities now have the clear ability to form storm-water utilities that can help assign costs associated with storm-water processing, administer resources and manage remediation solutions.

The formation of storm-water utility, that plays a significant role in determining municipal land use strategies, can be a critical tool for urban areas seeking to assess the true costs of storm-water remediation and generate innovative solutions to providing clean water. Assessing the feasibility, organizational structure, operations and rate structures is a critical first step to establishing these entities.

#### **Principles for Sustainable Land Use and Water Asset Management**

Clean water and a clean, healthy environment are essential to our city and region. Well designed, walkable communities with access to a variety of transportation modes and access to parks and open space are critical for meeting not only the market demand for places like Pittsburgh, they are essential to the City's future. Preserving land, investing in our existing infrastructure and addressing long standing challenges like storm-water are critical to our shared success. With this in mind we offer these policy principles for the next administration:

1. Preserve and protect our natural assets.
2. Target new growth and development to existing impervious sites.
3. Encourage development to be well designed and achieve maximum unit density.
4. New development should not result in degradation to water quality.
5. Redevelopment of existing sites should result in net improvement to water quality.
6. Retrofitting existing infrastructure and buildings must be a priority.
7. Scarce public resources should be used for retrofitting existing infrastructure.
8. Public rights of way and other public areas are excellent opportunities for retrofitting with low impact techniques and green infrastructure.
9. Public highways are significant contributors to storm-water run-off and must be rebuilt to reduce runoff.
10. Support watershed planning and implementation by engaging neighborhood and community organizations to be storm-water stewards.

11. Build partnerships with developers, other levels of government, regulatory agencies, and residential and commercial building owners to help achieve common objectives.

### **10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania**

We provide support and technical assistance to community leaders, local and state government agencies, hospitals, universities, regional planning agencies and private firms working to preserve or build great places and communities across Pennsylvania. We deliver our services through three primary methods:

- **Applied Research and Development** of public policy issues and programs related to improving land use decision making and place-making;
- **Technical Assistance Services** for local leaders on topics related to land use policy, place-making and public infrastructure investment; and
- **Network Building and Promotion** of projects, professions or policies that promote responsible land use and investment decisions that benefit Pennsylvania's communities.

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania is a leader in providing public policy solutions related to land use and municipal management. Through the course of the organization's history we have developed innovations in municipal planning with the creation of Act 67 and 68 of 1998 which allowed for joint municipal planning, led cutting edge research with the Brookings Institute and the drafting of *Back to Prosperity*; and created with PennDOT the Community Transportation Initiative – a \$85 million dollar program that invested in transportation projects that coordinated responsible land use decisions and transportation investments.





## A Case for Strengthening the Public-Private Partnership with the Allegheny Commons Initiative

By now, it is well understood that urban parks and green spaces are catalysts for economic development, neighborhood stability and healthy citizens. Studies abound that document and quantify the positive relationship between good parks and good communities. Citizens know this by instinct and will rise to the occasion to protect their park from abuse, neglect and encroachment.

For Allegheny Commons, this fact is little different than in 1867 when the park was designed and built to spur investment in the then City of Allegheny. The park was also intended to provide a “breathing place” for the then citizens of the sooty City of Allegheny, a respite from the densely built hardscape and a place for health and recreation.

But after 200 years of active use, Allegheny Commons, Pittsburgh’s first park, shows signs of age, abuse, neglect and deferred maintenance. Some of this is to be expected, since trees age and structural systems reach the end of their lives. Drainage systems malfunction and roads and walks deteriorate without periodic maintenance attention. Limited-life furnishings such as lights and benches need to be part of a planned replacement plan.

The *Master Plan for Allegheny Commons* developed in 2002 by the Allegheny Commons Initiative (ACI) with significant community involvement aims to protect the historic integrity of this important open space, while recognizing and protecting the evolution over time of its design and uses. The *Master Plan* is a guide for the physical preservation, restoration, rehabilitation or reconstruction, while calling for ongoing management and maintenance components to improve its value for both present and future generations. It is a living document that provides a comprehensive framework to inform decision making in the future while preserving its historic continuum.

Allegheny Commons is the front yard for:

- Over 10,000 residents that live within the park’s walkshed;
- More than 6,000 staff and visitors that are in Allegheny Health Network’s flagship hospital on any given day;
- Children attending two public schools, Allegheny Traditional and Pittsburgh King;
- Students at Community College of Allegheny County;
- Three business districts, East Ohio Street, Western Avenue and Federal/North.
- Visitor attractions including the National Aviary, Pittsburgh’s Children’s Museum, New Hazlett Theater, City of Asylum and sports venues along the North Shore.



## Allegheny Commons Initiative's Four Recommendations

- Be Strategic in Bridge Replacement
- Develop a Park Ranger Corps;
- Simplify Communication and Project Agreement Processes;
- Implement Allegheny Commons' Status as *Signature Community Park*

### Be Strategic in Bridge Replacement

The City is currently designing a replacement bridge over the N-S railroad tracks on West Ohio Street, under order to provide 22' clearance beneath it, up from its current 18', to allow double-stacked trains passage. The City has opted to provide the clearance by building an elevated bridge. By all accounts this will have an adverse impact on the historic integrity of the park, its viewshed and accessibility. What has failed to be considered is that there is a second bridge just 1500 yards away (at Brighton and North) that is reaching the end of its useful life. ACI believes that this bridge CANNOT be elevated, and that lowering the tracks will eventually be a necessity. Further, there are bridges at Pennsylvania Ave and Columbus Ave which also do not meet clearance, not to mention bridges along the East End busway. ACI strongly encourages the City to take a strategic approach to permitting double stacked trains to proceed through our City, to conduct a study of all the bridges before proceeding to build a single, unnecessarily elevated bridge at West Ohio Street.

### Develop a Park Ranger Corps

Allegheny Commons has an urgent need to insure that events are managed properly, vehicles are controlled, permits are enforced and park rules are respected. ACI's Master Plan calls for development of a Park Ranger Corps that would encourage proper park use for the protection of visitors and parks alike. The Rangers would have authority to address minor infractions – cars in the park, excessive noise levels, glass bottles, littering -- and have a relationship with City Police for serious issues. The Master Plan envisions Park Rangers not only as enforcers, but as ambassadors, helping with directions, information and putting forth an image of goodwill for the City. We urge the mayor to reinstitute the Ranger Program in all City Parks, which is consistent with OpenSpacePGH Strategy FF.

### Simplify Communication and Project Agreement Processes

Like other nonprofit partners throughout the City, ACI (understandably) needs various permits, approvals, support and legal agreements for the projects we undertake. The Mayor's Office, Council, the Law Department, City Planning, Public Works, Citiparks and both the Art Commission and Historic Review Commission each have a role. While no one argues the importance of City/Public involvement in park projects, there is a need for a more refined, efficient process with strong communication throughout. Significant ACI time and energy go seeking information and answers from the City, resources which are better spent directly on the park. This recommendation is consistent with OpenSpacePGH Strategy EE.

### Implement Allegheny Commons' Status as *Signature Community Park*

While Allegheny Commons is small in acreage – 64 acres in size – compared to the City's RAD parks, it is critical public space for the overall health of the Northside and the City. It is highly visible and has a direct impact on surrounding real estate in four neighborhoods. It serves an extraordinarily diverse mix of people – neighborhood residents, visitors to nearby cultural institutions, sports venues and Allegheny General Hospital, students at two public schools and CCAC, and the employees and consumers in three contiguous business districts.



The park's location, with stunning views and within walking distance of Downtown, offers great opportunity to attract private investment on its perimeter. It is poised to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, joining Allegheny West, Historic Deutschtown and the Mexican War Streets, due to its significant design.

OpenSpacePGH recognizes the importance of Allegheny Commons to the City, calling it a Signature Community Park, and has made it a high priority for investment. For instance, park lighting has completely failed posing a public safety hazard along North Avenue; the magnificent mature tree canopy, which provides many times greater environmental services than newly planted trees, receives little care and poses liability issues; encroachment continues to threaten the Commons – the original 110 acres set aside for public use in 1780 is now down to 64 acres. ACI looks forward to working with the new Mayor to make Allegheny Commons Park a Signature Community Park.

### **Accomplishments of the Allegheny Commons Initiative**

- Successful nomination to the National Register of Historic Places
- Development of the Master Plan for Allegheny Commons, with significant involvement by City, community and other park stakeholders;
- Two capital projects completed on the East Common and Northeast Common with a third (North Common and Northeast Fountain) underway;
- Care of the significant mature tree canopy and replacement and care of more than 230 new trees;
- Successful advocacy on park encroachment issues;
- Creation of the Friends of Allegheny Commons;
- Programming partnerships with Tree Pittsburgh, Venture Outdoors, Children's Museum, Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, and Mattress Factory.

### **Conclusion**

The Allegheny Commons Initiative is proud of its accomplishments to date, and looks forward to having an even bigger impact on the City with the new Mayoral administration to ensure that Pittsburgh remains a wonderful place to play, live and work.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Allegheny Commons Master Plan <http://www.alleghenycommons.org/masterplan.html>

### **For more information please contact:**

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## **BikePGH 2013 Platform**

- 1 **Safety First** - All Pittsburghers, young and old, will be safe biking and walking on our streets. A particular emphasis on safety will be made at intersections and on roads where excessive speeding is commonplace.
- 2 **Education** - The City will actively promote and encourage safe driving, bicycling and walking.
- 3 **Enforcement** - The City will aim to eliminate traffic deaths and crack down on the deadliest violations like speeding, aggressive driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended license, distracted driving, and failure to yield.
- 4 **Public Engagement** - Citizens will be consulted about the way the streets that they use everyday are designed regardless of whether the City, County or State owns them.
- 5 **Quality of life** - The City is committed to improving the health and quality of life of Pittsburgh through increased access to safe bicycling and walking facilities, and by creating and encouraging opportunities to bike and walk for all. Our neighborhood "mainstreets" will be great places to visit by foot and by bike.
- 6 **Freedom of Choice** - Pittsburgh is a city where it's easy and convenient to choose to either walk, bike, take transit, or drive. The ability to combine modes will be convenient and accessible.
- 7 **Best Practices** - Pittsburgh will be on the cutting edge of roadway safety and design, looking to the innovative facilities and designs that many US cities have installed.
- 8 **Commitment to Maintenance** - Pittsburghers will have cycling facilities and sidewalks that are properly managed and maintained.



## **Construction Junction Recommendations for the Next Mayoral Administration of the City of Pittsburgh**

Construction Junction is Pittsburgh's first nonprofit retail warehouse for used and surplus building materials. Over our 14 years of operation, CJ has expanded to become one of the largest reuse retail operations in the Country. With a staff of 30, an operating budget that exceeds 1.8 million dollars, and over 8000 donors of building materials thus far in 2013, we are well positioned to recommend key initiatives to promote job creation and economic growth through building material reuse.

Construction debris makes up approximately 40% of the solid waste stream. While there is a lack of reliable data to indicate how much of that construction waste stream is reusable and recyclable; it is not uncommon for both for-profit and nonprofit deconstruction companies to divert between 60% and 85% of a structure from disposal through reuse and recycling. Not only does deconstruction/salvage reduce pressure on landfills, but for every 1000 tons of waste generated reuse and recycling creates 4.7 jobs to only 2.4 created by when that waste goes to the landfill.

Four key City of Pittsburgh initiatives to divert useable building material from area landfills to reduce blight and create jobs:

1. Adopt an official policy statement that supports all types of deconstruction over demolition. This policy should be applied when considering demolishing properties reviewed by the Historical Review Commission to properties controlled by the City Housing Authority to properties condemned by the City of Pittsburgh
2. Include language that supports deconstruction over demolition in any new land banking legislation. Specifically the City (and County) should consider designating a portion of properties identified for demolition in the land bank to be deconstructed or at a minimum salvaged.
3. Include in all applications for building permits information about reuse and deconstruction. At a minimum anyone who is going to generate waste as part of a renovation or demolition should understand the environmental, economic, and tax benefits of donating useable building materials generated from renovation projects
4. Advocate for creation of a **state tax credit** that incentivizes commercial property developers to maximize building material salvage (beyond scrap metal). This could be included as part of the State's Historic Preservation tax

credit (if building qualifies for historic preservation tax credits) or other financial incentives from the URA tied to maximizing reuse

Demonstrated success in these areas four areas would lay the groundwork for consideration of a waste diversion ordinance tied to demolition permits.

## Transitioning Vacant Land Into Community Assets: Data, Site Access, & Job Creation

Vacant land represents one of the City's most untapped resources. If left unaddressed, there are detrimental consequences to the health of neighborhoods across the City including higher rates of crime, tax delinquency, vandalism and further neighborhood decline. The single greatest impact of vacant land is the loss of neighborhood cohesion and the destruction of the fabric that creates vibrant communities. Concentrations of vacancy can be found in the City's most economically distressed and underserved neighborhoods. Unemployment rates in neighborhoods with significant tracts of vacant land outpace the city average and a dearth of employment opportunities keep these rates considerably higher.



Property maintenance is costly and requires resources that municipalities alone do not have the capacity to provide. In many cases, residents have proven to be powerful partners for increasing capacity to maintain vacant properties. This paper explores solutions for neighborhood-based, large-scale vacant lot maintenance pairing a strong emphasis on data processes including collection, analysis and sharing with local workforce development programming.

The problem of vacant land is daunting, as reported in the 2013 Open Space Plan, the total number of vacant parcels at 35,040 representing approximately 18.7% of all of the land area within the city.<sup>1</sup>

### FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS PROVIDED BY GTECH STRATEGIES

GTECH Strategies proposes several innovative policy recommendations to simultaneously address these two issues. This paper introduces each recommendation and provides additional details for possible implementation.

1. Develop a system of data processes that include policies for open sharing, standards, collection and analysis to assist in prioritizing city-wide maintenance
2. Create maintenance standards for all vacant parcels and provide continual monitoring protocols linked to existing code enforcement practices.
3. Establish a model for City issued maintenance contracts setting a preference for neighborhood based small business and workforce training programs
4. Streamline site access processes in order to encourage resident-driven action

GTECH Strategies believes the abundance of vacant land and lack of employment opportunities in high vacancy neighborhoods can be a solution in solving these two issues. Currently, the City of Pittsburgh lacks a comprehensive strategy for maintaining the thousands of vacant lots it owns. According to a publication in *Pittsburgh Today*, the city only performs annual maintenance on 27 percent of the lots in its inventory of tax-delinquent properties.<sup>2</sup> The Department of Public Works does its best to maintain the vast numbers of publicly owned parcels but a new vacant property strategy is needed. If not addressed, the negative consequences of vacant land will be exacerbated especially in the high vacancy neighborhoods. Listed below are detailed strategies for recommendations provided.

### 1.) WORKING WITH DATA IN ORDER TO MAKE DATA WORK

City and County governments, non-profit organizations and local universities regularly execute surveys for data collection using their own standards and methodologies with variations in storage, analysis and sharing practices. Diminished capacity and budget constrain the robustness of the data collected and the lack of alignment between partners contributes to wasted financial resources and time.

A standardized data approach could be taken in assessing the city's vacant land across various datasets and allow governmental departments and service providers to consistently track progress. This open flow of data allows for streamlined communication between landscape crews servicing maintenance contracts and the authoritative body authorizing such agreements. This data should allow residents to see when parcels are scheduled for maintenance in their neighborhood creating a level of transparency.



## 2.) MAINTENANCE PRIORITIZATION BASED ON REAL-TIME DATA

Assessing the City's assets and the current conditions of its vacant parcels with community input will allow for neighborhood maintenance priorities to be established and concurrent work programs to be implemented. This allows for effective budgeting from the landowners perspective and for contractors to effectively schedule maintenance.

New programs such as LocalData and Civic Insight bring the process of data collection into the hands of community members, whose knowledge of their neighborhoods is critical. A standardized surveying process provides stakeholders baseline statistics and knowledge about the condition of the inventory. Crews must be aware of parcel conditions in order to plan monthly maintenance. New partnerships with data collection and management organizations, enable Pittsburgh to revolutionize its decision making process and how it allocates resources. Surveys are cloud-based allowing contractors, crews and third party assessors to remotely verify the status of each lot throughout the year.

## 3.) A LOCAL WORKFORCE TO ADDRESS A LOCAL CHALLENGE

The maintenance of vacant, blighted land should provide education, training, and employment opportunities to residents of high vacancy rate communities. It is our recommendation that the City of Pittsburgh grant landscape maintenance contracts to businesses that are committed to hiring residents from within the high vacancy neighborhoods they service. This expectation should be specifically written into a Request for Quotation (RFQ) released to landscape companies seeking contracts for publically owned parcels. These contracts should extend over a minimum of 2 years establishing a sense of permanency for workers. We strongly support the addition of a 30-day contract cancellation clause within the agreement to assure accountability by a contracted entity. Contracts should specifically outline the expected frequency of visits and standards of maintenance for each site per month and support that with photo documentation.

Pittsburgh has several organizations preparing individuals for first time or re-entry workforce opportunities. We recommend engaging existing programs working with hard to employ individuals to establish a workforce program for vacant land maintenance supported through city issued contracts.

A successful vacant land workforce development program must be highly organized and attentively managed. The city should establish a strategic partnership with an umbrella organization or coalition of organizations to assist in the facilitation and management of city maintenance contracts. This organization should understand vacant lot reclamation and be strongly connected to our City's neighborhoods.

## 4.) STREAMLINE PROCESSES TO INCREASE ACCESS AND SUPPORT TRANSITIONAL USES

Currently, the City's Garden Waiver Program allows access to publicly owned parcels for one calendar year and requires a level of administrative support to review and process renewals. Applications for renewal, along with required site designs, insurance policies and other documents, must be submitted at the first of the year for approval, regardless of the month the application was approved. Administering longer-term site access agreements to organizations and individuals with a proven record of care would reduce the City's maintenance cost and administrative work needed to secure access to individual sites. Extensions will also allow for an increased level of commitment from the community as the permission of a long-term agreement indicates an advanced sense of ownership over a space.<sup>3</sup>

## 5.) SITE ACCESS RECCOMENDATIONS

Although the City of Pittsburgh does not own all the vacant land within its boundaries, by default it owns all the associated problems. The City now has a unique opportunity to implement policies that will address vacancy and provide workforce development to members of communities that need it the most. Pictured below is a chart demonstrating a proposed city process for streamlining site access agreements. The process is based on both activity, project type and term limit. Creating this system will simplify contract disbursement and reduce the amount of clerical oversight necessary for establishing agreements with individuals and community based groups. from the date of submittal

## PROPOSED SITE ACCESS PROCESS

	STABILIZATION	SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To maintain, but not alter in a significant way, the condition of vacant lots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate community involvement</li> <li>Transformative project installation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustain and grow community involvement</li> <li>Provide anchor green spaces for communities</li> </ul>
ACTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal usage of lot</li> <li>Project Example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Clean and Green'</li> </ul> </li> <li>Growth is &lt;2' tall               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mow and Clean</li> </ul> </li> <li>Growth is &gt;2' tall               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial cutback handled by DPW</li> <li>Volunteers will:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fill sinkholes</li> <li>Haul away debris and cuttings</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stabilization and plantings</li> <li>Plantings with one year growth cycle</li> <li>Project Examples:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sunflower Gardens</li> <li>Wildflowers</li> <li>Annual Plantings</li> <li>Community Gardens</li> <li>Community Art</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expansion of short-term projects</li> <li>Introduction of semi-permanent features, examples include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fences</li> <li>Benches</li> <li>Perennials</li> <li>Raised beds</li> </ul> </li> <li>Project Examples:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playspaces</li> <li>Raised beds</li> <li>Permaculture features</li> <li>Art installations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
TERM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&lt;1 Week - 1 calendar year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 year from the date of submittal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2+ Years from the date of submittal</li> </ul>
LIABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City assumes liability</li> <li>Option to provides volunteer waiver for renunciation of city insurance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City assumes liability</li> <li>City provides 1-year contract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City waives liability</li> <li>Local partner or organization assumes liability</li> </ul>

### 6.) CONCLUSION

It is stated in Pittsburgh ordinances, "City Council hereby finds that Disruptive Properties place a substantial unacceptable threat and burden on the common health, safety and welfare of the residents of the City of Pittsburgh."<sup>4</sup> Untamed vacant properties are a principal example of these unacceptable threats. The implementation of neighborhood workforce programs allows the City to tackle two of its greatest problems with one solution. In our holistic pursuit for greener, healthier and responsive neighborhoods, it is our hope that you will move to adopt the recommendations laid out in this paper to create a thriving 21<sup>st</sup> century Pittsburgh.

### 7.) ABOUT GTECH STRATEGIES

Since 2007, GTECH Strategies has reclaimed more than 1,000,000 square feet of vacant land. Effective planning and foresight has allowed GTECH Strategies to transition dozens of catalytic projects into self-sustaining community assets. As an organization, GTECH Strategies works to include a wide variety of community, institutional and governmental partners. Working with a broad spectrum of partners creates a network of resources that communities are able to utilize over the life of their projects. Constructing this vast network has granted our organization the ability to introduce innovative new services and opportunities to the Pittsburgh region.



Starting this year, we are working with a coalition of organizations to revolutionize how community-based data is collected, shared and maintained. By working with LocalData, an open-source data platform, GTECH Strategies is working to provide the democratized data collection and reporting tools necessary so communities have a hand in designing their future. Our position of not being dependently rooted in one particular neighborhood has allowed our organization to tackle complex problems with innovative solutions from a broader perspective.

While major accomplishments have been made in reclaiming vacant spaces, we recognize the need for even more progress. The City of Pittsburgh has recently published its' OpenSpace PGH Plan, detailing the foreseeable future of the city's investments and strategies for dealing with vacant land. We applaud this effort, and commit ourselves to assisting in making the plan a reality. By utilizing the OpenSpace PGH plan and work being done in cities across the country, GTECH Strategies will be able to work with local and regional partners to tackle vacant spaces in our communities.

#### 8.) SOURCES

1. City of Pittsburgh Planning Department. *City of Pittsburgh Comprehensive Plan: OpenSpace PGH*. Pittsburgh, PA. 2013. Online.
2. Fraser, Jeffery. "Nobody Home: The Rise of Vacancy." *Pittsburgh Today*. Pages 1-27, Online.
3. Grossman, Bob. *Neighborhood Know-How For Property Maintenance*. Presentation at Reclaiming Vacant Properties 2013, Philadelphia PA. September 9-11, 2013.
4. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Title 6: Conduct, Article VII Disruptive Properties, Chapter 670: Disruptive Property Abatement and Title 6: Conduct, Article VII Disruptive Properties, Chapter 670A: Disruptive Property Appeals Board.



## **Public-Private Partnership: *Protecting and Connecting Greenspace in the Airport Corridor***

### **Background**

Hollow Oak Land Trust owns and manages six conservation areas in the Pittsburgh International Airport corridor. These conservation areas serve three primary purposes: 1) preserve wildlife habitat, 2) provide public access for outdoor recreation, and 3) mitigate stormwater impact.

Hollow Oak is developing a new model for land conservation that builds on Pittsburgh's strengths, both geographic and cultural. In recent years, the region has reawakened to its wealth of natural amenities, placing greater value on greenspace, such as parks and waterways. Participation in outdoor recreation is at an all-time high and demands for new trails are a perennial top priority for communities.

Hollow Oak leverages land protection and greenway development as dual catalysts for municipalities to place greater value on their natural amenities. With a focus in the Airport corridor, we are forging new connections among conservation areas, community parks, trails, waterways and other greenspaces. In this way, we *protect and connect* greenspace, including wildlife corridors and trails that benefit flora, fauna and people alike, while also boosting municipal goals for land use and operational efficiency.

Working with Moon Township, the Airport Authority and private landowners, Hollow Oak's model project is the 10-mile Montour Woods Greenway, which will link our 260-acre conservation area and 300-acre Moon Park with the 46-mile Montour Trail. We are working with faculty and students at Robert Morris University to measure the economic impact of this greenway, which will launch the creation of a much larger network of greenspaces extending from the Airport to the City. Pittsburgh's potential is endless for such public-private synergy within a conservation-oriented approach to development. We hope to meet with the new administration to discuss how we can work together toward both economic development and conservation.

### **Recommendations**

- Conservation-Oriented Development:  
*Stimulate economic development through strategic greenspace protection*
- Protect and Connect:  
*Move beyond the island-approach to planning*
- Stewardship:  
*Develop land stewardship programs as conduit to civic engagement*



## ***Recommendations from Hollow Oak Land Trust***

Hollow Oak Land Trust aspires to be a great nonprofit partner for municipalities and neighborhood organizations throughout the Pittsburgh Airport Corridor and we stand ready to bolster efforts by the City of Pittsburgh to enhance wildlife habitat, expand outdoor recreation and utilize green infrastructure for stormwater management. Below are our suggestions for launching the next phase of Pittsburgh's renaissance as one of the greenest and most dynamic cities in America.

### **Conservation-Oriented Development: *Stimulate economic development through strategic greenspace protection***

Hollow Oak is developing the Montour Woods Greenway in Moon Township as a model project for conservation-oriented development in the Pittsburgh area. By demonstrating the economic impact of protecting and linking public and private greenspaces, we hope to provide a planning model for Pittsburgh and other municipalities to enhance their land use plans. At its core, zoning practices will be leveraged to: 1) protect core wildlife habitats, 2) link them through wildlife corridors, and 3) establish recreational trails across public and private land. A system of metrics will be compiled to track municipal revenues and cost savings from our land protection and stewardship.

This project will be Hollow Oak's first step in creating a larger network of interconnected greenspaces throughout the Airport corridor. We hope to have the opportunity to work with the City of Pittsburgh to develop a systematic approach that empowers neighboring municipalities to strategically preserve land via public-private partnerships as a means of stimulating economic development.

### **Protect and Connect: *Move beyond the island-approach to planning***

One of the Pittsburgh area's greatest assets is its natural heritage of streams, wooded valleys and wildlife. Greenspace exists in every Pittsburgh neighborhood, extending to the Airport and beyond. But, when fragmented into "islands," these natural assets are diminished and opportunities lost.

Hollow Oak Land Trust would be an enthusiastic partner with the City to identify opportunities for new conservation easements and conservation areas that would produce a broader network of greenways. Through easements, options exist to retain ownership while also protecting conservation values for the public benefit. By using such options, the City and adjacent municipalities together can protect the region's verdant character, while also stimulating economic development in adjacent areas. Hollow Oak can help municipal planners and private landowners utilize greenways to reach economic goals.

### **Land Stewardship: *Develop volunteer programs as conduit to civic engagement***

Parks, trails and other greenspaces require management to protect public investment and public benefit. Invasive species and vandalism alike diminish these assets and create barriers to the myriad benefits from interaction with nature. There exists an immediate need for a multi-tiered program utilizing nonprofit organizations, volunteers and city employees to provide better stewardship of Pittsburgh's greenspaces.

Similar to other land managers, Hollow Oak is developing a land stewardship program with an emphasis on volunteerism and community engagement to help us control invasive species, maintain trails and improve habitat. At its core, land stewardship involves volunteer recruitment, training, communications and management. We would like to work with the City of Pittsburgh and other nonprofit organizations to develop a comprehensive program for these purposes, following best practices for stewardship while also making efficient use of limited resources.



### ***Appendices: Trail Maps***

- Montour Woods Greenway, Moon Township  
<http://www.hollowoak.org/conservation.html>
- Montour Woods Conservation Area, Hollow Oak Land Trust  
<http://www.hollowoak.org/programs.html#montourwoods>

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MOUNT WASHINGTON  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

## **Cementing Emerald View Park's future through the private-public partnership between the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation and the City of Pittsburgh.**

Municipal, state and national leaders increasingly acknowledge the role parks can play in cities as driving forces for economic development, neighborhood stability, and outlets for recreation and healthy living. Pittsburgh is extraordinarily fortunate to have 171 park facilities covering some 2,300 acres, placing the city among the nation's top 100 for parks. Pittsburghers can thank some truly visionary leaders for today's park system, dating back to early land donations like that by Mary Schenley to a much later vision like the creation of Emerald View Park from land that was once mined, denuded, dumped on, lived on and later vacated. Born out of the mine-scarred hillsides, Emerald View Park echoes Pittsburgh's rebirth. Located in Mount Washington, Duquesne Heights and Allentown, the Park, co-stewarded by the City of Pittsburgh and the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation, grew out of a grassroots effort that culminated in a unanimous December 2006 City Council vote to create the Park. This short paper offers data to support the strengthening of Pittsburgh's Park system, discusses how Emerald View Park is a key part of this system, and suggests ways to strengthen the vision of an integrated park system that will meet the expectations of long-time Pittsburghers and newly attracted residents for years to come. (For a map of Emerald View Park visit

[http://mwcdc.org/projects-programs/emerald-view-park/visit-emerald-view-park/.](http://mwcdc.org/projects-programs/emerald-view-park/visit-emerald-view-park/))

### **How Parks Help Make Cities Great**

Close cooperation between the City of Pittsburgh and the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation will help ensure Emerald View Park, Pittsburgh's newest regional park, will continue to benefit from this strong public-private partnership. There is no doubt, given what we are seeing nationally, that beautiful, safe, clean and well-maintained parks make for smart politics. Not only do parks provide a host of environmental benefits that often lead to economic savings, like stormwater, air quality and temperature remediation, but we know that the city's parks are assets by a number of other indices widely valued by the public and officials:

- **Economic Impact:** Parks have a direct, positive impact on real estate costs, as two recent studies have shown. A study commissioned by the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority and undertaken by a policy analysis team at Carnegie Mellon University placed a "green premium" of

\$40,000 on proximity to parks for residential homes<sup>1</sup>. Overlooking downtown, Emerald View Park's development echoes this finding, spurring more than \$25 million in real estate development on properties proximate to the Park over the last several years, with additional projects in the early planning stage. As one local developer with significant investment in the neighborhood reminded us recently, the Park is "the unique community asset that brings renters and homebuyers to the area." Additionally, with nearly 1.5 million visitors a year, the Park's developing 19 mile trail system is helping to keep visitors in the neighborhood for longer, contributing significantly to our local businesses. (See data on the Great Allegheny Passage<sup>2</sup> for an example of how outdoor recreation is having a significant economic development impact.)

- **Recruitment and Livability:** Corporations use an excellent parks system as a recruitment tool for young professionals. Colleges and universities use the park system to recruit faculty, administration and students. In addition, data<sup>3</sup> has shown that an individual's attachment to their community positively influences local economic growth, and that one of the key factors in building this attachment is through quality parks and trails. Mount Washington is reaping the benefits of Emerald View Park, increasingly attracting young professionals interested in buying their first homes here as well as "empty nesters" downsizing from their suburban homes and looking for City amenities like quick access to work and parks.

- **Sustaining Pittsburgh's Green Leadership:** Emerald View Park embodies this image of a City re-invigorated. A 257 acre Park growing out of land that was once heavily mined, dumped on, denuded of all vegetation, lived on and ultimately vacated, Emerald View Park is ahead of the curve in brownfield development and vacant land re-use. No other city can compete with the scale of this greening initiative coupled with its proximity to downtown, again making Pittsburgh among the nation's green leaders.

- **Public Health:** A spring 2013 Regional Indicators Study by PittsburghToday shows Pittsburgh is "unhealthy by any measure." Parks not only improve air quality, but also offer a free place for healthful exercise, thus playing a significant role in creating a healthier population. This is particularly true in neighborhoods where parks have historically been underrepresented. For example, until the creation of Emerald View Park, no regional Parks existed south of the Monongahela River, making EVP the only one within short driving distance of one-third of the City's neighborhoods, including some of its poorest and least served.

This paper seeks to provide the city's next mayor with concrete strategies for protecting and enhancing the investment thus far in Emerald View Park. It lays out a call for leadership in park-related policy and next steps to strengthen the partnership with organizations like the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation that aim to develop an improved park system for

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<sup>1</sup> Aiello, Daniel et al. 2010. "Measuring the Economic Impact of Green Space in Pittsburgh." Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.atatrail.org/about/docs/GAPeconomicImpactStudy200809.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 2010. Knight Soul of the Community 2010: Why People Love Where They live and Why It Matters: A National Perspective. John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

[http://soulofthecommunity.org/sites/default/files/SOTC\\_2010\\_Report\\_OVERALL\\_11-12-10\\_mh.pdf](http://soulofthecommunity.org/sites/default/files/SOTC_2010_Report_OVERALL_11-12-10_mh.pdf)

the people of Pittsburgh. It also offers a record of significant progress made to date and the importance of improving structural efficiencies in parks governance that can be cost effective for the City and its taxpayers and the citizens and philanthropists who support Emerald View Park.

#### **The Mount Washington Community Development Corporation's Four Suggestions**

The partnership between the City of Pittsburgh and the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation has shown great results and even greater promise. Following are 5 suggestions from the MWCDC to strengthen both the process and the outcome. The public private partnership between the City and the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation relies heavily upon explicit support and direction from the Mayor's Office, and we hope to develop a strong relationship and shared understanding of the role of Parks and non-profit partners with the next incoming Mayor. Towards this end, we propose the following for consideration by the next mayor of the City of Pittsburgh:

- Promoting Emerald View Park to an equal status with the City's other regional parks.
- Enabling a strong City commitment to Emerald View Park and its future.
- Developing a corps of urban park rangers to keep the parks safe and to enforce park rules.
- Developing a model, streamlined process and template for cooperation on new projects.

#### *Promoting Emerald View Park as equal with the City's other regional parks.*

In April 2007, Emerald View Park was declared Pittsburgh's Fifth Regional Park at an Earth Day ceremony, but it has not yet achieved the high profile of the City's other Regional Parks – either with the public, or even within the City's governance system. Stewardship responsibilities for EVP have been adopted by the City, generously, but inconsistently. For example, EVP appears on only some of the City's maps and websites, the existence of five regional parks are only referred to occasionally by city officials and employees, and there is no dedicated park crew for EVP (as there are for the other regional parks). Additionally, the MWCDC has long supported the position that with the increase in park acreage, the City should request an increase in funding for its regional parks from the Allegheny Regional Asset District Board (ARAD). Over the years small increases were requested, but have not been awarded. However, in February 2011 the ARAD Board cleared the way for the City of Pittsburgh to spend RAD funding on Emerald View Park. Since then the City has spent a relatively small amount of money on the Park, but significant needs still remain, including signage, sidewalk development and repair, trailhead and parking lot development, and regular maintenance and management through the work of a dedicated park crew. The MWCDC would like the new administration to take its stewardship of Emerald View Park sincerely, dedicating park crews, ensuring consistency in communication about its parks, implementing the 2005 Management Study of Pittsburgh's Regional Parks, and determining how to obtain an increase in the amount of ARAD funding awarded to Pittsburgh's parks, with any dividend being spent in Emerald View Park.

#### *Enable a strong City commitment to Emerald View Park and its future.*

Over the last 7 years as Emerald View Park has grown from dream to reality, the City of Pittsburgh has been a wonderful partner, with a variety of departments generously providing time and resources as

available. However, competing needs from other neighborhoods and a lack of city resources has meant that the MWCDC has driven the process – fundraising, planning, implementing and lobbying on behalf of the Park. This private-public partnership has worked well so far, resulting in the creation of a park that few believed was possible. However, as we move into our 8<sup>th</sup> year, it is time to think critically about how this relationship functions, and examine how it may become even more productive. There are some drawbacks to the MWCDC having had a relatively more proactive role, including the fact that deep knowledge about the Park resides with only a few MWCDC staff members, and a strong sense of City ownership over the park initiative has yet to develop (as evidenced in the preceding paragraph). This type of ownership over the project will only develop if City officials and staff are actively engaged in the next phase of planning and implementation. Now that the Park is being viewed as a unified system, and the Park's original master plan is nearly 10 years old, we will need to develop a new Park Master Plan within the next 2 years. City officials and staff need to be proactively involved in creating, and then implementing, this plan. So that various departments develop both a stronger knowledge base and stronger commitment to Emerald View Park amongst City of Pittsburgh officials and employees, we recommend holding quarterly meetings under the auspices of the mayor's office between the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation and city personnel charged with developing Emerald View Park. This will enable a deeper understanding of park conditions, needs and issues, as well as give a stronger and clearer voice to city representatives in the next phase of essential Park planning.

#### *Developing a Park Ranger Corps.*

In the first half of the 20th century, the City of Pittsburgh had a first rate full-service Parks Department and a separate Parks Police Force to keep the parks safe and patrolled. The Park Police were disbanded years ago and only the Pittsburgh Police provide park security now.

The public, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and the City have participated in an ongoing discussion about the need to develop a park ranger program since 2002. Park rules exist but are not enforced because there is no one in the Parks to enforce them. A corps of unarmed but uniformed rangers would have the ability to enforce park codes and regulations and provide a visible symbol of security in the parks. This is particularly important in a new park like Emerald View Park where infractions range the gamut from quality-of-life infractions (off-leash dogs and littering) to environmental violations (illegal dumping and tree removals) to serious safety hazards (motor bike riding and illegal hunting.) A visible ranger corps would reduce disobedience by acting as a deterrent, but they would also make more people feel comfortable using the Park, which in itself keeps more "eyes" on the Park and reduces breaches in lawful activity in the Park.

#### *Developing a model, streamlined process and template for cooperation on new projects.*

Various permits, approvals and legal agreements are needed for every capital project from the Art Commission, the Planning Commission, and/or the Historic Review Commission, and for every volunteer day in the park. While we certainly understand and respect the need for permitting, permissions, agreements and approvals, we also believe there is a clear opportunity for a more refined, streamlined process for both project and volunteer day approvals. Significant resources of

time and energy go into following existing processes. These resources could be better spent directly on the parks, and we would be happy to help inform the creation of a revised process if called upon to do so.

### **Major Emerald View Park Accomplishments**

Very few people thought it was possible to build a park on steep hillside land that was once mined, denuded of all vegetation, inhabited, and dumped upon, particularly in a community that was as well known for its querulous nature and its view. But the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation, working closely with the City of Pittsburgh, and supported by a wide array of foundation, state and federal funders, is showing that it is possible, one step at a time. Since the Park's creation in December 2005, the MWCDC has accomplished the following:

- Four subsequent unanimous City Council votes have expanded the Park, and the MWCDC, along with its partners, have been fundamental in adding more than 31 acres to the Park since its creation.
- The MWCDC has raised \$4.4 million in investment towards the Park.
- It has produced the 2005 Park Master Implementation Plan and the 2010 Master Trail Plan that will ultimately create 20 miles of trails in the Park.
- The MWCDC has planted over 6,000 native trees and 3,000 pounds of native grass seed, and is in the process of sustainably restoring 6 acres of invaluable view corridors across the Park that save the City of Pittsburgh \$175,000 per year in tree removal and management costs.
- We have installed two well-respected statues, upgraded street lights in the Park, and hosted dozens of park-related events.
- MWCDC has removed over 250,000 pounds of garbage that had been dumped in what is now parkland.
- We have constructed or renovated more than 7 miles of trails, largely through our Emerald Trail Corps, a green jobs program that trains, employs, and obtains full-time employment for adults with barriers to employment in Pittsburgh.
- The MWCDC has enabled more than 10,000 hours of volunteer Park stewardship and 4,000 hours of youth employment.
- The Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group recognized our accomplishments with an award in May 2010, and the national organization, City Parks Alliance recognized Emerald View Park as a "Frontline Park" in 2012.

### **Conclusion**

The Mount Washington Community Development Corporation believes strongly that not only is Emerald View Park one of the neighborhood's strongest assets, but because of the sheer number of visitors that already visit Mount Washington (in excess of 1.5 million annually), the Park could play a substantial role in regional development if the City were to promote the Park to the profile it deserves. We are eager to work with the new administration to help raise the Park's profile so that it

can become the national model for sustainably developing steep, degraded hillside.

**Appendices available upon request**

Appendix A –Emerald View Park’s Master Implementation Plan, 2005.

Appendix B – Emerald View Park’s Master Trail Plan, 2008.

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## **Priorities and Recommendations For the Next Mayoral Administration of the City of Pittsburgh**

The Nine Mile Run Watershed Association (NMRWA) works to restore and protect the Nine Mile Run watershed in Pittsburgh's east end. Through outreach and education, we involve local leaders and volunteers in community greening initiatives to foster a healthy urban environment. Our programs complement the amazing transformation of the Nine Mile Run stream in lower Frick Park, site of one of the largest and most successful urban stream and wetland restorations in the United States. The \$7.7 million project, which took place between 2003 and 2006, was overseen by the US Army Corps of Engineers, and involved a significant in-kind contribution by the City of Pittsburgh Departments of Planning and Public Works. The restoration is maintained today through a unique partnership between the City of Pittsburgh DPW, NMRWA, and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy.

The restoration turned what had been a dangerous, polluted eyesore into a significant regional amenity. Despite this success, the stream still faces major challenges, including excess stormwater runoff and resulting sewer overflows in wet weather, and elevated bacteria levels of mostly unknown origin in dry weather. Since its founding in 2001, NMRWA has worked to educate residents of the upper watershed communities of Squirrel Hill, Point Breeze, Homewood, Wilkinsburg, Edgewood, and Swissvale about their connection to the stream, involving them in simple, cost-effective interventions that make a direct positive impact on water quality while also improving their communities.

In addition to our central role in stewarding the restoration through litter clean-ups, invasive plant removal, and monitoring of water quality, NMRWA has, since its founding in 2001, brought better stormwater management solutions to the watershed. More than 1600 rain barrels and a dozen rain gardens have been installed in the watershed, and hundreds of volunteers have helped to plant 869 trees. Together these interventions divert tens of thousands of gallons of rain from the sewers and the stream with every rainfall. Yet today, seven years after the completion of the restoration, it is still not safe to walk barefoot in the stream due to sewer overflows, and the volume and velocity of stormwater in major rain events still threatens the physical integrity of the restoration. The NMRWA Board of Directors considers this situation unacceptable and has therefore identified a single strategic goal for the next three years: *further reduce the flow of sewage and stormwater runoff into Nine Mile Run.*

To achieve this goal, interventions on a larger scale in the upper watershed communities are required. We believe that additional green infrastructure, on commercial property and in the public right of way, can play a key role in achieving our goal and will also bring other multiple



benefits to our communities; some grey infrastructure work will be necessary as well. Although much of the NMR watershed lies outside the City of Pittsburgh, there are a number of things that the Mayor of Pittsburgh could do that would have a positive impact.

**Therefore NMRWA recommends that the incoming mayoral administration:**

- Prioritize green solutions for consent decree compliance before allowing large-scale investments in grey infrastructure to proceed.
- Offer strong support for the adoption of a stormwater fee in the PWSA service area, including fee reductions for property owners who mitigate their stormwater runoff.
- Ask PWSA to include repair of any major underground sewage discharges into the Nine Mile Run culvert as high-priority early action items in their capital budget plans.
- Develop a corps of Park Rangers for Pittsburgh's major parks, to enforce park rules and keep visitors safe.

Let's look more closely at each of these proposals:

**Prioritize green solutions for consent decree/consent order compliance before allowing large-scale investments in grey infrastructure to proceed.**

NMRWA has been devoted to urban ecological restoration, not just in Frick Park, but throughout the watershed. Even if it were possible to eliminate all sewer overflows and excessive stormwater runoff with grey pipe/holding tank solutions (an unlikely and very expensive proposition), this approach would do nothing to bring our communities cleaner air, to lower temperatures and energy bills in the summer, to create habitat, or to increase property values or revitalize business districts through greening. If, as a region, we commit to issuing bonds for very large scale grey infrastructure solutions for the sewer fix, there will not be enough funding available to implement significant green infrastructure. If we prioritize green solutions, we will not only achieve significant community benefits, but we will be able to "right-size" our grey investments, building only what is actually necessary to handle the reduced amount of runoff that the green infrastructure could not handle.

PSWA has emerged as the regional leader in taking an Integrated Watershed Management approach to complying with their consent order. The new mayor can support this approach through appointments to the PWSA and ALCOSAN Boards of Directors, and by insuring that all relevant City departments are directed to work cooperatively with PWSA to implement their green infrastructure strategies efficiently and to maintain them properly.

**Offer strong support for the adoption of a stormwater fee in the PWSA service area, including fee reductions for property owners who mitigate their stormwater runoff.**

To have any chance of managing a quantity of stormwater sufficient to avoid building the tunnels proposed by ALCOSAN, we must insure that impervious surfaces on private property are included in the solution. The best mechanism for insuring that is a stormwater fee that requires those contributing the most water to the system to pay the highest amount (i.e., a fee based on square feet of impervious surface.) PWSA has studied this idea and is leaning toward implementation, but it will be politically challenging. The new Mayor could be the spokesperson

who helps PWSA and the nonprofit and academic communities that support this idea to educate the public as to why it is in their long-term best interest. If PWSA is able to accomplish this, it will be highly influential throughout the ALCOSAN service area. So far, Mt Lebanon is the only municipality in Allegheny County to have instituted a stormwater fee. Through our StormWorks social enterprise, which provides stormwater management services to homeowners and small businesses throughout Allegheny County, we have found greater interest in green solutions in Mt. Lebanon than anywhere else outside our own watershed. Establishing this fee, and offering reductions for those who mitigate their runoff, will immediately incentivize the private sector to help solve the problem.

**Ask PWSA to include repair of any major underground sewage discharges into the Nine Mile Run culvert as high-priority early action items in their capital budget plans.**

While green infrastructure can contribute significantly to reducing sewer overflows, there will be some locations where traditional grey infrastructure work will need to be done as well. There are several PWSA diversion structures under Hill and Rosedale Sts. in the Homewood area that overflow into underground tributaries of Nine Mile Run. In the current PWSA plan, these are expected to be addressed in 2020 or 2021. Given the extraordinary resources that the City of Pittsburgh has already devoted to the Nine Mile Run Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration, and the national attention this stream restoration has received, we believe that removing the sewage from the stream should be a higher priority. Support from the Mayor's office for our request to PWSA to prioritize this work would be very helpful. Let's not wait another ten years for it to be safe to walk barefoot in the stream!

**Develop a corps of Park Rangers for Pittsburgh's major parks, to enforce park rules and keep visitors safe.**

While this recommendation doesn't relate directly to our key objective of getting the sewage and stormwater out of the stream, it is central to much of our work in the restoration area. NMRWA staff members are in Frick Park frequently, leading educational and stewardship activities and they rarely if ever see police there, though they do see many violations of park rules. Park users sometimes attempt to press our staff into service to enforce the rules. This is not their job, and asking them to play this role could put them into dangerous situations. Visible, uniformed park rangers would provide an important deterrent to infractions and faster reporting when these incidents do occur. This will make our parks safer for all users, and protect the significant investments that both the City of Pittsburgh, and its many nonprofit partners, are making in our parks. This idea has been discussed for years – now it is time to act!

For more information please visit the following websites:

For the Nine Mile Run Watershed

Association:

[www.ninemilerun.org](http://www.ninemilerun.org)

For StormWorks:

[www.swpgh.com](http://www.swpgh.com)

For the Clean Rivers Campaign:

[www.cleanriverscampaign.org](http://www.cleanriverscampaign.org)

or contact:

Brenda Lynn Smith, Executive Director, 412-371-8779, ext. 113, or [Brenda@ninemilerun.org](mailto:Brenda@ninemilerun.org)





## **Collaboration for Green infrastructure through private-public partnership between The Penn State Center and the City of Pittsburgh**

Recently many North American cities with aging stormwater and sanitary sewer systems were being challenged with regard to their respectful compliance to the Clean Water Act. In January 2008 the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) agreed in a legal, binding document known as a Consent Decree, that ALCOSAN would achieve compliance with the Clean Water Act during periods of wet weather. In order for ALCOSAN and its 83 municipalities in Allegheny County to comply with the Consent Decree, a series of requirements for planning, design, construction, operation and permitting must be met. The primary requirement of the consent decree is the elimination of Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) and control Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) being discharged into the Ohio, Monongahela, Allegheny Rivers and their tributaries of Chartiers Creek, Saw Mill Run, and Turtle Creek.

Employing green infrastructure has been the strategy of various cities that also have a consent decree from the U.S. EPA. It is believed that green infrastructure would reduce ALCOSAN's need for expansive and very expensive grey infrastructure. The 83 municipalities serviced by ALCOSAN including Pittsburgh and its Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) could be incentivized to install green systems with an outcome of source reduction, limiting the amount of flow into ALCOSAN's treatment system. For years, green infrastructure has been poorly designed and installed causing a reduction in confidence with the methodology. Although not all green infrastructure approaches have been rigorously evaluated, most are proven. For example, a 180 square foot rain garden traps 8,000+ gallons of water per year – water that will not contribute to a sewer overflow. However green infrastructure provides more than just environmental benefit. This paper is highlighting success in implementation of green infrastructure in the city of Pittsburgh and through collaboration of the City of Pittsburgh Department of Public Works, while emphasizing the need to continue and promote green infrastructure for the benefit of all.

### **The Penn State Center – Engaging Pittsburgh**

The Penn State Center, located in the central business district of Pittsburgh, is the premier example of diverse and relevant engaged scholarship and community problem solving for the Greater Pittsburgh area. As a national model, it is a conduit for the exchange of research based practice into the community from across the University. This effort is based on the successful extension model but has been expanded to include programming most relevant to the urban environment through the connection with the breadth of a world class institution for learning and research.

In 2007, a pilot Penn State Center was launched in Allegheny County/Pittsburgh (known as the Pittsburgh Metro Region), to focus on developing and strengthening local relationships to more comprehensively address the Land Grant mission by connecting and engaging the entire University with local partners and local problem solving. This innovative initiative was based on the acknowledgement that metro centers in the Commonwealth also needed to be included in the benefits of the transfer of research based practice into community problem solving to the same level as their rural counterparts. Rural areas have consistently benefited from this practice since the inception of the 1882 and 1890 national Land Grant network and the consequent legislation that formed Cooperative Extension 100 years ago:

In 1860s during the time of the first Morrill Act, 19.8 percent of the U.S. population was considered urban with the remainder, 80.2 percent counted as rural. In 1910, circa the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, 45.6 percent of the population was urban and 54.4 percent was rural. Today, 79% of our population is urban and 1.6% is counted as farmers. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, our national population migrated significantly towards urban centers (U.S. Census, 2000).

The Penn State Center- Engaging Pittsburgh was charged with building on the mission and best practice of Extension through connections with other Penn State colleges that were interested in Metro areas. The Center serves as a platform from which any Penn State academic program can engage the Greater Pittsburgh area. It exists to bring research and knowledge from the Pennsylvania State University to improve people's lives in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area. The Center provides an operational base capable of institutional engagement in a wide variety of programming activities that span student learning, faculty research, and community outreach.

### **The Penn State Center- Engaging Pittsburgh Proven Suggestions**

The Penn State Center continues to find ways to engage the entire University with local partners and local problem solving. With a goal to demonstrate stormwater mitigation through green infrastructure in Pittsburgh, The Penn State Center collaborated with the City of Pittsburgh Department of Public Works' Construction Division beginning in 2011. To date, the two projects designed and installed within the city limits are Four Mile Run Bioswale Demonstration project at 200 Saline Street in lower Greenfield and The Environment and Energy Community Outreach (EECO) Center's Stormwater Mitigation Garden at 300 Larimer Avenue near the intersection of East Liberty Boulevard and Larimer Avenues. Both projects include curb channels for storm runoff to flow into bioswales with street trees and native plant material, parallel to the city streets with pervious concrete sidewalks. The EECO Center project also includes the installation of storm channels directing the storm runoff into a demonstrative rain garden. Additional pervious paving consisting of permeable pavers and limestone walkways lead the visitor to



planted areas of native plants for sun or shade and/or butterfly habitat, while educating each aspect with interpretive signage. These installations:

- Expressly reinforce the highly recommended use of green infrastructure as a means of reducing stormwater flow into the ALCOSAN treatment system.
- Indicate that through public/private partnerships, green infrastructure technology will be available utilizing this source reduction methodology including but not limited to:
  - Public education and availability of information;
  - Implementation of rain garden and rain barrel initiatives;
  - Installation of bioretention within rights-of-way;
  - Utilization of permeable pavements where deemed possible;
  - Daylighting streams when possible.

Through this past collaboration between The Penn State Center and the City of Pittsburgh, effective green infrastructure has begun to make a difference environmentally by removing gallons of stormwater from our sewer system; adding aesthetic and educational demonstration for community and visitors; and helping trades to understand the economics of new green systems. It would be extremely beneficial to the City of Pittsburgh if, in addition to this existing collaboration implementation of green infrastructure, it was required for all future projects in our urban fabric.

In addition to design and installation, The Penn State Center offers the possibility for fully testing innovation. Both these projects have been monitored by Penn State and will continue to be monitored to contribute to the existing scientific data regarding attribute of the environmental benefits of green infrastructure.

The Four Mile Run Bioswale project borders both Alexis and Saline Streets within the city right-of-way. Located at the bottom of a 20-30% steep residential hill on Alexis Street, this site has been prone to flooding. This green infrastructure installation aims to both mitigate stormwater as well as treat possible contamination present in the street runoff of the lower Greenfield neighborhood. Through flow observations, soil moisture data, rainfall data and water analysis, this project contributes to the importance and effectiveness of green infrastructure within the City of Pittsburgh. As an educational demonstration, with the inclusion of curb channels directing storm runoff into the bioswales the amount of flooding in the neighborhood will be slightly reduced, the aesthetic beauty of the area will be enhanced, and it will allow for the neighborhood to experience the first known green infrastructure project in a City of Pittsburgh right-of-way. The use of flow rates observed during a storm, soil moisture sensors, water contamination and rainfall records allow for all-inclusive monitoring of the bioswale installed in Four Mile Run.

As one of our hydrology interns, Jillian Zankowski, noted: *"When looking into the future of Green infrastructure, this small demonstration project can be a major stepping-stone in the right direction. The neighborhood of Four Mile Run has historically encountered many hardships through disadvantageous weather conditions and economic downturns. However, the use of Green infrastructure can provide answers to both issues. Bioswales, rain gardens and greenroofs (to name a few), can work to sustainably*

*mitigate harmful stormwater and improve the aesthetics of the neighborhood. Through visual improvements, it is possible to bring new economic interest and educational opportunities to the community, improving its well-being."*

Throughout its first summer of operation, The EECO Stormwater Mitigation Garden has successfully captured and managed stormwater. Monitoring inflowing stormwater rates, soil percolation and infiltration rates, and pavement infiltration rates, as well as sampling and analyzing soil provided baseline data and verification that the stormwater mitigation garden in fact functions as intended. All infiltration and percolation tests of both the soil and pavements demonstrated that the site is capable of infiltrating all direct rainfall as well as inundating and draining any stored runoff. Finally, the soil analysis provided data on the soils' preliminary conditions. Overall, this project has successfully demonstrated that green infrastructure is a feasible approach to managing stormwater runoff within urban areas. Although The EECO Stormwater Mitigation Garden is only a small project, its abilities demonstrate that more green infrastructure throughout the city of Pittsburgh will reduce stormwater flowing into the combined sewer system, thus aiding in the reduction of combined sewer overflows.

According to the local firm, Landbase Systems, the green design of The EECO Stormwater Mitigation Gardens has the potential to manage:

- Based on assumed parameters, in the 2011 year the green infrastructure features of the EECO Stormwater Mitigation Garden could manage 135,000 gallons (97.5% of intercepted runoff) and does NOT CONTAIN 4,000 gallons of intercepted runoff in 9 events with a total duration of 9.75 hours
- Based on assumed parameters, using a 2 year 24 hour summer design storm, the green infrastructure features of The EECO Stormwater Mitigation Garden could manage 4,390 gallons (90.6% of intercepted runoff) and does NOT CONTAIN 450 gallons of Intercepted runoff in 1 events with a total duration of 7.25 hours

## **Conclusion**

The Penn State Center – Engaging Pittsburgh strongly believes that installation of green infrastructure as a component of all future construction projects will benefit Pittsburgh in four ways – environmentally by mitigating stormwater as well as treating possible contamination of street runoff; aesthetically through vegetation; educationally to demonstrate design and installation; and finally economically through enhanced property values. In addition to those initial collaborative projects of green infrastructure in the city right-of-way, green roof installations such as on the County Office Building have proven themselves with the collection of comprehensive data through various monitoring activities. Other efforts such as vacant lot rejuvenation through re-naturalization or urban agriculture that can create food hubs, should also be considered as a major mayoral platform within the realm of green infrastructure.



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"Green Infrastructure." *Pennsylvania Environmental Council* (2011): n.pag. Web. 2 Aug 2012.

<http://www.pecpa.org/green-infrastructure>. Web. 2 Aug 2012.





## **A Case for Strengthening the Public-Private Partnership With The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy**

Over the past decade nationally, the city parks movement has gained tremendous power on a number of fronts. Parks are now recognized by municipal, state and national leaders as driving forces for economic development, neighborhood stability, and outlets for recreation. Pittsburgh is extraordinarily fortunate to have 171 park facilities covering some 2,300 acres, placing the city among the nation's top 100 for parks.

**But more can be done.**

There is a need for close cooperation between the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy so that parks in Pittsburgh can enjoy many more improvements funded by this strong public-private partnership. There is no doubt, given what we are seeing nationally, that beautiful, safe, clean and well-maintained parks make for smart politics. We know that the city's parks are assets by a number of measures that the public values:

- **Economic Impact:** Parks have a direct, positive impact on real estate costs, as two recent studies have shown. A study commissioned by the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority and undertaken by a policy analysis team at Carnegie Mellon University placed a "green premium" of \$40,000 on proximity to parks for residential homes. In the heart of downtown, Mellon Square improvements are central to the third "Renaissance" for the city, where green, gathering spaces play a prominent role. The Mellon Square improvements are expected to add significantly (by at least \$71 million), to estimated real estate values of properties within 500 feet of the square. This includes several of Pittsburgh's leading corporations.
- **Recruitment Tool:** Corporations use an excellent parks system as a recruitment tool for young professionals. Colleges and universities use the park system to recruit faculty, administration and students.
- **Livability Standards:** A park system is important to "livability" standards, such as rankings by Rand McNally.
- **Sustaining Pittsburgh's Green Leadership:** Pittsburgh has long cast aside its reputation as a dirty city. The planned Environmental Center at Frick Park further places Pittsburgh at the vanguard of green building. The Environmental Center will be among the first in the city to be constructed to the demanding, performance-based standards of the Living Building Challenge. No other city in the Northeast has adopted the Living Building Challenge as Pittsburgh has done, again making it among the green leaders.
- **Public Health:** A spring 2013 Regional Indicators Study by PittsburghToday shows Pittsburgh is "unhealthy by any measure." Parks, which offer a free place for healthful exercise, can play a significant role in a green prescription for a healthier population.

This paper seeks to provide the city's next mayor with concrete, measureable strategies for protecting and enhancing the value of the investment made to date in Pittsburgh's parks. It makes a call for leadership in creating a dynamic dialogue with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy that will provide for improved, safer parks; preservation and/or restoration of major aspects of parklands; and improved park maintenance. It also offers historical perspective on significant progress made to date and the importance of improving structural efficiencies in parks governance that can be cost effective for the City and its taxpayers and the citizens and philanthropists who support the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy.

### **The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy's Five Suggestions**

The City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy partnership has been extraordinarily successful in its upkeep of parks, but the process could be much more efficient and productive. Without support and explicit direction from the Mayor's Office, the public private partnership between the City and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, appreciated by citizens as a strong force for renewal in Pittsburgh's parks, can sometimes be valued less highly than it warrants and rendered less effective than it ideally could be.

Given the track record of a good working relationship and productive outcomes from the relationship between the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, we propose the following for consideration by the next mayor of the City of Pittsburgh:

- The finalization of an agreement for the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy to construct and operate the Environmental Center at Frick Park, with adequate, dedicated operating funds from the Frick Trust
- Development of a corps of urban park rangers to keep the parks safe and to enforce park rules
- A return to implementation of the best practices in park maintenance for the Regional Parks as outlined in the Management Study of Pittsburgh's Regional Parks by Timothy Marshall in 2005
- The re-establishment of quarterly meetings under the auspices of the mayor's office between the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and city personnel charged with leading or managing an aspect of the park system to oversee continued implementation of the Master Plan for the Parks
- Development of a model, streamlined process and template for cooperation on new projects

### **Finalize the Agreement for the Environmental Center at Frick Park**

For the past 11 years, the City and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy have been developing the plan to rebuild the Environmental Center at Frick Park, which burned in 2002. The legal agreement for the project has been the subject of drafting and negotiation between the City and the Parks Conservancy since 2010, but three years later, it is not yet signed.

Beyond the sheer impact the Environmental Center will have on park enjoyment and on science education in Pittsburgh, the proposed building has real potential to be a feather in Pittsburgh's cap, as it will be among the first in the city to be constructed to the demanding performance-based standards of the Living Building Challenge.

### **Development of a Park Ranger Corps**

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the City of Pittsburgh had a first rate full-service Parks Department and had a separate Parks Police Force to keep the parks safe and patrolled. The Park Police were disbanded years ago and only the Pittsburgh Police provide park security now.

There has been ongoing discussion between the public, the Parks Conservancy and the City as far back as 2002 about the need for development of a park ranger program to provide a visible symbol of security in the parks. Park rules exist but cannot be enforced because there is no one with the authority to enforce them. The establishment of a corps of unarmed but uniformed rangers who would have the ability to write tickets for quality-of-life infractions such as off-leash dogs or speeding mountain bikes is crucial to the continued safety and enjoyment of park users. As recently as April, a woman was attacked in a very visible location at Frick Park, <http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com/2013/04/12/pregnant-woman-takes-on-would-be-robber-at-frick-park/>.

#### **Implement the 2005 Management Study of Pittsburgh's Regional Parks**

About 20 years ago, in what was an economy measure, the full-service Parks Department was broken up. Today, the Department of Public Works picks up the trash and cuts the grass while the Parks and Recreation Department maintains some sports facilities (pools, tennis courts, and the ice rink) and manages events like the Great Race, Bach Beethoven & Brunch. The City Planning Department also has input on management decisions pertaining to capital improvement projects in the parks. The Law Department, Alcosan, the Parking Authority, The Special Events office and PWSA are sometimes involved in park issues. Because of this separation of responsibilities, messages, approvals and prioritization of projects can get confused within the City administration itself. In extreme cases, this can even cause damaging setbacks on important parks projects.

In 2005, with funding from the local foundation community, nationally-known parks consultant, Timothy Marshall, conducted a study of best practices in parks management and maintenance tailored to the parks operations in the City of Pittsburgh. Both municipal employees and staff from the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy were involved in the seven month process that resulted in a set of recommendations to achieve excellent parks.

For a time, city government was committed to implementing these recommendations. Over time, however, and with changing administrations, much of the progress originally achieved has been reversed. A copy of the executive summary of this study is included with this white paper. The Parks Conservancy urges the city's next mayor to review and re-implement this prescription for better-maintained parks.

#### **Re-establish quarterly meetings under the auspices of the mayor's office between the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and city personnel charged with leading or managing an aspect of the park system to oversee continued implementation of the Master Plan for the Parks**

With significant funding from the Pittsburgh foundation community and from the Pennsylvania DCNR, a Master Plan for the Regional Parks was developed from 1998-2000 with a large consultant team headed by LaQuatra Bonci and Michael Stern and at a cost exceeding half a million dollars. Many city personnel and Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy staff members were involved throughout this three-year process. In 2011, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy funded an update of the plan to enable it to cover the parks of Pittsburgh as a system.

A copy of the original and the updated master plans are included with this white paper.

Given the difficulties of making progress in park improvements with such a wide variety of municipal governments having a slice of authority about parks, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy respectfully suggests that the next mayor consider instituting a program of calling quarterly meetings between the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and relevant city personnel, and that the mayor direct that the parks master plans be followed as a matter of standard practice.

### **Simplify Permitting Issues and the Project Agreement Process**

Various permits, approvals and legal agreements are needed for every capital project from the Art Commission, the Planning Commission, and/or the Historic Review Commission, and for every volunteer day in the parks. The Parks Conservancy understands the need for and respects and follows procedures for permitting, permissions, and approvals, but seeks a more refined, efficient process for both project and volunteer day approvals. Significant resources of time and energy go into following existing processes. These resources could be better spent directly on the parks.

These strategies could be implemented and become excellent avenues to visible and speedy progress on many park fronts. They could insure that all decisions about parks -- governance, planning, management, maintenance, security and community feedback -- are communicated in a way that would contribute to more efficient parks management and create a consistent message to the community and to funders.

### **The Parks Conservancy: Demonstrating Knowledge, Accountability**

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is a bright spot among conservancies in cities of equivalent or even larger sizes. The Parks Conservancy has been single minded in its focus on parks and its knowledgeable and holistic approach to parks improvement. The Parks Conservancy has enjoyed bi-partisan support and demonstrated its accountability and partnership with the City of Pittsburgh in the following ways:

- Formed in December 1996 in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh, it has raised nearly \$70 million in private funding to restore several of the city's most significant parks.
- Capital projects completed include the Frick Park Gatehouse, Reynolds Entrance; the Schenley Plaza and the Schenley Park Visitor Center, the Mary Schenley Fountain restoration and Illumination in Schenley Park; the Highland Park Entry Garden, Highland Park Babbling Brook, Highland Park Seasonal Pools in Highland Park; and the Riverview Park Chapel Shelter Landscape and building restoration.
- Capital projects in process or development include McKinley Park Entrance ( Beltzhoover); Clifftside Park (Hill District); Mellon Park Walled Garden (Shadyside); the restoration of Mellon Square in Downtown Pittsburgh; and creating a new hub for environmental education in the city's largest park through the rebuilding of the Frick Park Environmental Center.
- The Parks Conservancy oversaw the development of and promoted a "Parks Are Free" campaign created and funded by the UPMC Health Plan. A mobile parks application is now in development with UPMC Health Plan support with the idea that the app will allow users to feel more knowledgeable about their parks and use them more.
- Economic impact studies directly link the value of parks to a "green premium" for neighborhood real estate and the economic vitality of the downtown.
- The Parks Conservancy has undertaken park user studies and taxpayer surveys (Anzalone phone, 2009) that show that one half of young families use Pittsburgh's parks on a weekly basis. One third of voters in the sample used the parks weekly.
- The Parks Conservancy, in partnership with the City, manages the popular green gathering space, Schenley Plaza, now one of the nation's Top 50 "most visited" parks (as rated by the Trust for Public Land).
- With foresters from the city and various experts, the Parks Conservancy has engaged in the creation of a Park Tree Action Plan to recover a parkland tree population decimated by pests and disease.

- The Parks Conservancy has helped Pittsburgh maintain or reclaim its history, restoring the beautiful and historic Mary Schenley Fountain in Schenley Park, Mellon Square downtown, and celebrating the 1960 World Series win by the Pittsburgh Pirates by installing a sidewalk plaque honoring Bill Mazeroski.
- Parks Conservancy ecologists, working with other experts from the city and county, are assessing the environmental impact of the city's watersheds, with the aim of conducting pilot remediation projects in Schenley Park that could handle millions of gallons of stormwater runoff for densely populated neighborhoods in Squirrel Hill.
- Parks are important classrooms. Through its education programs, the Parks Conservancy has engaged more than 27 classes of school age children in first grade through high school in hands-on scientific activities that use parks as classrooms. Scientific engagement and providing tools for teachers to use is increasingly important as the United States struggles to keep its students engaged in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

## **Conclusion**

Economic and environmental stability are hallmarks of every project undertaken by the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh through three mayoral administrations. These efforts have important, quantifiable value. Every day throughout the United States, we hear news about places where parks are not valued, how the public health is suffering for lack of affordable recreational outlets, and teachers struggle for opportunities to connect their students with the importance of science. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy looks forward to even more successful partnership efforts with the new mayoral administration that will further enhance Pittsburgh's reputation as a fabulous place to live and work.

## **Appendices**

***Appendix A –Anzalone-Liszt – Parks Research Study of 400 City of Pittsburgh registered voters - 2009***

***Appendix B – 2005 Timothy Marshall Report on Management and Maintenance of Pittsburgh's Parks- 2005***

***Appendix C –Pittsburgh Regional Parks Master Plan - 2000***

***Appendix D– Pittsburgh Parks Updated master Plan - 2011***

For more information, contact:

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## **PTAG Requests –**

- Define a Process for Volunteer Trail Improvement Authorization - Create an MOU between the City & PTAG
- Clarify Trail Policies
- Insure the Safety of our Parks
- Increase the connectivity between parks, residential areas and business districts
- Protect our Parks

### *Define a Process for Volunteer Trail Improvement Authorization –*

The Pittsburgh Trails Advocacy Group actively works with the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works as well as the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and other stakeholder groups to insure all volunteer trail projects are in line with the City Parks Master Plan and approved. The process however takes a lot of time and energy that could be spent improving the trails. Local park users that have been discouraged by the process have decided to forgo working with PTAG, the City and other stakeholders to implement projects independently, resulting in user conflicts and environmental degradation. The city's inability or unwillingness to address these rogue trail building activities undermines the process that the city has asked of PTAG and encourages further independent action.

PTAG requests that the city formally recognize PTAG's role in the community and expertise in regards to singletrack trails by working with us to draft and sign a formal MOU that will create a streamlined process to authorize volunteer trail projects in the city parks and other open spaces. PTAG's MOUs with the Allegheny and Butler County Parks Departments have facilitated increasing levels of community engagement and reduced instances of user conflicts. PTAG is also currently working with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy on an MOU to formalize ongoing cooperation between our two organizations. Having the city join in on this process would provide the leadership needed to help our organizations manage the needs of the local trail users.

### *Clarify Trail Policies –*

City Code 473.03 section e states that biking on trails is permitted on designated trails only. There are no trails however officially designated for a specific use other than the Frick Nature Center Trail, where signage states that biking is not permitted. Ambiguity over the authorized use of trails has become a source of conflict between park users. PTAG requests that the city code be changed to state that all trails are intended for shared use unless specifically designated and signed as otherwise. A formal process is needed to establish trail use designation.

### *Improve the Safety of our Parks –*

If residents do not feel safe in the parks they will not utilize them or the trails. A stronger authority presence is required in the parks to not only protect visitors from those seeking to intentionally inflict harm but to also insure that visitors respect and follow the intended use of park amenities, including trails. PTAG supports the OpenSpacePGH recommendation calling for the creation of a Park Ranger program.

### *Increase Connectivity –*

Residents and visitors to the region must be able to locate and travel to parks in order to utilize them. Improving alternative transportation including walking, biking and mass transit between parks, residential areas and business districts will increase access to the parks and the trails.

### *Protect our Parks –*

The Pittsburgh Trails Advocacy asks that the City of Pittsburgh permanently protect our parks by banning any commercial resource extraction operations on our public lands, e.g. natural gas, timber.

### **Conclusion**

Our parks represent the most democratic space in our society, where one can visit and enjoy the benefits they offer regardless of socio-economic background. Parks provide a venue to interact with neighbors, friends and family in an atmosphere free from the stresses of every day life. Visitors however will not utilize a park if it does not provide a calming environment and the outdoor recreation opportunities they seek. The Outdoor Industry Association has measured that Outdoor Recreation has a \$646 Billion impact on the US economy. The Pittsburgh Trails Advocacy Group is excited to continue working with our elected officials and all stakeholders to provide city residents and other park visitors the opportunity to play an active role in the ongoing development of our public lands and thereby maximize the value they create for our region.

### **Contact Info**

Please contact Peter Greninger, PTAG President, to further discuss the value of trails and engaging local residents in the ongoing management of trail networks within our Public Lands. Phone – (412)736-6236; Email – [pgrenin@rei.com](mailto:pgrenin@rei.com)

### **Resources to Consider**

De Brun, Constance T.F., ed. *The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation*. Washington, DC: Trust for Public Lands, 2007.

Harnik, Peter, and Ben Welle. *From Fitness Zones to the Medical Mile: How Urban Park Systems Can Best Promote Health & Wellness*. Washington, D.C.: Trust for Public Lands, 2011.

*The Outdoor Recreation Economy*. Boulder, CO: Outdoor Industry Association, 2012.

*Parks & Recreation in Underserved Areas: A Public Health Perspective*. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association, 2012.

United States. National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. *Healthy Parks Healthy People US: A Holistic Approach to Promoting the Health and Well-being of All Species and the Planet We Share*.





## **Urban Forestry Priorities and Recommendations for New Mayoral Administration**

Tree Pittsburgh's mission is to protect and restore the City's tree population through community tree planting and care, education and advocacy.

Pittsburgh's urban forest—its green hillsides, verdant parks and shaded streets—is a valuable municipal resource, making our City a more desirable place to live, work, and play while improving the environment. Moreover, our hillsides have become a new symbol for Pittsburgh, providing an unparalleled—and often surprisingly green—urban experience for residents and visitors alike.

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates just how essential trees are to our quality of life - cooling our city during the hot summer months, helping to reduce water and air pollution, and bringing a sense of calm to our bustling urban life.

With proper maintenance, our urban forest is an asset that gains value as it matures. According to the US Forest Service, as trees grow larger their ability to provide environmental services and benefits increases dramatically. David Nowak, of the USDA Forest Service, demonstrates in his research that, “a big tree does 60 to 70 times the pollution removal of a small tree.”

Unfortunately, Pittsburgh, along with many other cities in our country, has experienced a substantial decline in its urban forest due to a variety of causes including construction, pollution, disease and neglect. Great strides have been made over the last several years to plant and care for publicly-owned trees and to create a greater awareness among Pittsburghers about the benefits that trees provide. Over 1,200 local volunteers have graduated from the Tree Pittsburgh Tree Tender program, and more than 20,000 new trees have been planted along streets, in parks, and along waterway trails by the TreeVitalize Pittsburgh partnership, both demonstrating the renewed enthusiasm for our urban forest.

Our efforts to understand the state of our street tree population and to create a comprehensive strategy to improve its size and condition led us to take the steps to deepen our understanding of our urban forest resource as a whole and to create goals and strategies to efficiently protect, manage, and grow the forest across all City neighborhoods. To that end, the City's very first Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) was completed in June 2012, a 20-year plan to grow and protect Pittsburgh's tree canopy – both on private on public land.

There are a series of recommendations in the Urban Forest Master Plan that are the solely the City's responsibility to implement, and it is important to note that both the City Forester, Lisa Ceoffe, and Andrew Dash from City Planning participated in its creation as well as multiple other partners and stake-holders. Further, the UFMP is referenced in the Council-adopted, OPENSOURCEPGH plan. We are happy to provide a full presentation of the plan to your transition team and/or future staff. We hope that you will consider the recommendations and call upon Tree Pittsburgh for assistance during your transition.

In the short-term, there are a series of “low-hanging fruit” recommendations that can make an immediate and positive impact.

- 1.) Respond to pest and disease outbreaks and threats to the urban forest
- 2.) Fully staff the Department of Public Works Forestry Division, prioritizing inspectors and administrative support staff
- 3.) Promote the enforcement of tree ordinances and zoning code through City Planning and ensure that City-owned properties are up to code
- 4.) Prioritize and take seriously the results of the operations review that is currently underway for the Forestry Division – a project of the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission.

## **Respond to pest and disease outbreaks and threats to the urban forest**

According to the 2011 Urban Tree Canopy Analysis conducted by Tree Pittsburgh as part of the City's Urban Forest Master Plan, the City stands to lose a majority of its trees if pest and disease threats go unchecked.

### **Pest Susceptibility (2011)**

Asian Longhorned Beetle	1,780,000 Trees (67%)
Emerald Ash Borer	230,000 Trees (9%)
Dutch Elm Disease	220,000 Trees (8%)
Gypsy Moth	175,000 Trees (7%)

The City's urban forest is already feeling the effects of Emerald Ash Borer and Oak Wilt – with entire blocks of Ash trees being removed and acres of land clear-cut in the parks due to Oak Wilt.

A working group made up of local non-profits, the City Forester, and PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has formed and is collaborating to address present and looming pest and disease threats; however, the City must dedicate more personnel time and resources to keep ahead of threats. The UFMP makes a series of recommendations around the issue, and the working group is available to provide a briefing to the administration and recommend a course of action.

## **Fully staff the Department of Public Works Forestry Division, prioritizing inspectors and administrative support staff**

Action United recently hosted a rally in Garfield over crumbling sidewalk infrastructure and hazardous street trees. The rally demonstrates the public's dissatisfaction with the City's maintenance of its infrastructure and the pace and efficiency of its public response system. At one point, the City Forestry Division had over 30 employees, and now it is down to a crew of 12 – with two inspectors and no administrative support staff. To maintain a high-quality of public responsiveness and operational efficiencies, it is necessary to build capacity in the Division.

## **Promote the enforcement of tree ordinances and zoning code in City Planning**

Time and again we see new development in the City where tree code is not followed – beautiful mature trees are cut down and new trees are planted improperly or left out altogether, an opportunity to preserve and expand the City's tree canopy is missed and in some cases, funds are wasted due to poorly executed planting projects. These mistakes cost the City in the long run to maintain poor quality trees and the the missed benefits that they could have provided. The Urban Forester position in City Planning was meant to remediate this problem, but the position was left unfilled when Lisa Ceoffe was moved to the Department of Public Works when City Forester David Jahn left. In addition, the City can set the example by bringing its own properties up to code, including parking lots, vacant properties, and buildings.

## **Prioritize and take seriously the results of the operations review that is currently underway for the Forestry Division – a project of the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission.**

The Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission recently approved a contract with Davey Resource Group to conduct an operations review of the Forestry Division as well as a plan to improve and maximize performance. Once complete, the Director of Public Works should consider the report's recommendations seriously and make appropriate changes.

## **Tree Pittsburgh – a valuable partner**

Tree Pittsburgh, formerly Friends of the Pittsburgh Urban Forest, was organized in 2006 by members of the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission to carry out fund-raising, education, and stewardship activities aimed at restoring and protecting Pittsburgh's urban forest. The organization's vision is to be a leader in creating a healthy and robust urban forest by engaging citizens to maintain, plant, and protect trees. Tree Pittsburgh opened its office doors in June 2007 and has quickly earned the attention and respect of community residents and key stakeholders. Organizational accomplishments include:

- Raising funds and managing contracts for the professional pruning of over 1,000 street and park trees (ongoing),
- Facilitating the planting of 20,000 street, park, and riverfront trees,
- Developing and launching the Tree Tender program aimed at fostering advocates and stewards for trees just over 1,200 Tree Tenders graduated to date,
- Coordinating nearly 3,700 volunteers since 2009 to mulch and weed over 10,000 street trees, prune 3,149 street trees – totaling over 9,200 hours.
- Leading multiple demonstration planting efforts across the City including: the streetscape at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, parking lot retrofits in East Liberty, and boulevard greening in East Liberty,
- Coordinating hillside and greenway restoration projects along the Three Rivers Heritage Trail with Friends of the River and TreeVitalize Pittsburgh,
- Providing an annual "green" job experience for high school and college students,
- Establishing a community tree nursery with a current stock of more than 8,000 seedlings, and
- Leading Pittsburgh's very first Urban Forest Master Planning process to create a 20-year roadmap for growing and maintaining the City's tree canopy – including a comprehensive state of the urban forest analysis.

Tree Pittsburgh is growing to include a larger staff with a more sophisticated infrastructure so that we can continue both to aid the City Forestry Division in the professional maintenance of city trees as well as to expand programming that gets to the heart of its mission – volunteer tree maintenance, planting, and public education. In an era of increasing environmental awareness and responsibility, we are ready now, more than ever, to take steps to deepen our understanding of our urban forest resource as a whole and to create goals and strategies to efficiently protect, manage, and grow the forest across all City neighborhoods.

## **Appendix:**

**A.) Urban Forest Master Plan recommendations**

**B.) "Garfield Residents Call on City to Maintain Overgrown Trees, Fix Broken Sidewalks" WESA radio. August 26, 2013.**



## Appendix A

**Following are a list of recommendation pulled directly from the Urban Forest Master Plan.**

**Interagency Cooperation and Partnerships** – we observe a disconnect, internally between City agencies and externally with partners that hinders efficiency and capacity and often results in missed opportunities.

- 1.) Convene a summit of all agencies with a major impact on our urban forest to formalize communication methods, identify cooperative projects, and seek synergy.
- 2.) Formally describe urban forest management responsibilities across all agencies and partners. With a clear division of labor and articulated responsibilities, workflow will more smooth and efficient.
- 3.) As long as urban forestry responsibility and funding are divided among various agencies, the City should ensure the means to increase interdepartmental communication and cooperation for plans and projects that may affect the urban forest.
- 4.) Identify cooperative projects that connect private land owners to the City's urban forest goals.
- 5.) Perform a comprehensive operational review of the City's Forestry Division.

**Equitable Urban Forest Benefits** – it is no secret that some Pittsburgh neighborhoods have more trees than others, nor is it a surprise that wealthier neighborhoods have more trees, in better condition, than economically distressed neighborhoods. While the fact remains that all City neighborhoods have their share of forestry needs, the Urban Forest Master Plan addresses tree canopy distribution issues with a series of recommendations, and the City has a clear role to play in ensuring that all Pittsburgh residents benefit equally from the urban forest.

- 1.) Give priority for urban forestry and outreach activities to disadvantaged communities that are currently gaining the least benefit from the urban forest.
- 2.) Prioritize neighborhoods for future tree planting and protection efforts to increase deficient tree canopy figures and allow for more equitable canopy cover across the City.
- 3.) Respond to resident requests for trees rather than property owner requests.
- 4.) In neighborhoods with long-term vacant properties, respond to adjacent residents' requests to plant trees in front of the vacant properties.
- 5.) Do not allow absentee landlords to veto tree planting on adjacent public property.

**Urban Tree Canopy Cover Goals** – according to the 2012 State of the Urban Forest Report, the City's tree canopy cover is at 42%. While this number seems robust, most of the tree canopy is located in parks, hillsides, and vacant properties. These trees provide substantial benefits to City residents, but they do not provide the same benefit as trees planted within communities. Neighborhood trees provide shade to homes and businesses, capture stormwater before it hits impervious surfaces, and bring beauty and a sense of place to communities. We must balance the protection and restoration of our natural areas with the proactive planting and care of neighborhood trees.

- 1.) Utilize the UTC analysis in conjunction with the i-Tree analyses to increase awareness about the relationship between trees and environmental quality and to engage stakeholders in tree planting.
- 2.) Set a goal to maximize street tree stocking levels.
- 3.) Target parks and other public land to maximize possible canopy coverage.

- 4.) Adopt performance-based planting strategies by selecting species based on desired benefit outcomes rather than canopy cover alone.
- 5.) Design a backyard tree planting and tree care toolkit for private landowners interested in planting trees to increase benefits that guide people to choose species and planting locations that maximize benefits.
- 6.) Share established tree canopy goals and share the UTC analysis with stakeholders concerned with the urban forest.
- 7.) Budget adequately to maintain trees after planting.
- 8.) Generate positive canopy impacts on small-scale development and redevelopment projects by incorporating canopy goals into municipal landscape requirements for streetscapes, parking lots, and other sites.

#### **Match Funding to Desired Level of Service for Urban Forestry Management**

- 1.) Reassess the City's urban forestry program budget in terms of achieving street tree and UTC planting goals, the recommended seven-year preventive maintenance cycle, and the young tree maintenance programs.
- 2.) Sustain established partnerships and create new partnerships as a means to leverage resources needed to accomplish urban forestry goals.
- 3.) Increase penalties for developers and builders who damage trees and ensure enforcement.

#### **Develop a proactive management regime for public trees**

- 1.) Regularly monitor public trees for maintenance needs, risks, and pests.
- 2.) Develop a protocol that provides for regular updating of the public tree inventory.
- 3.) Implement a cyclical maintenance schedule of all street trees that provides for a seven-year cycle of inspection.
- 4.) Ensure that cyclical maintenance includes pruning of medium-sized and large trees to reduce risk and extend the productive life.
- 5.) Ensure that cyclical pruning also includes care for newly planted and young trees in their formative years.
- 6.) Communicate and engage with the community regarding the urban forest plan.
- 7.) Ensure the Tree Tender program continues so that the City can narrow its focus on mature tree care

#### **Develop a proactive risk management program for public trees**

- 1.) Facilitate a systematic tree maintenance program for public trees.
- 2.) Maintain an updated tree inventory with risk rating data that utilize the tree risk assessment standards in ANSI A300 (Part 9) and the Best Management Practices published by the ISA that address both tree inventories and tree risk assessment. [63, 64, 65]
- 3.) Create a prioritization scheme in the public tree inventory that rates trees based on risk levels.
- 4.) Use qualified individuals such as ISA Certified Arborists to monitor public infrastructure improvements for potential increase in tree risk and to identify potentially high-risk trees as part of regularly scheduled inventory updates.

- 5.) Perform re-inspections after storms that include heavy winds or snow that may increase branch loading.
- 6.) Promptly remove and prune trees identified with severe and high risk.
- 7.) Integrate a sidewalk repair program with proper arboricultural practices and a permit system that tracks proposed work near public trees.
- 8.) Maintain adequate funding levels for risk management using in-house funding or partnerships with nonprofits or obtain new funding stream.

#### **Ensure tree benefits for future generations through a sustainable planting program**

- 1.) Enforce city codes that require tree planting to be a part of development projects.
- 2.) Establish street tree stocking goals for each neighborhood and for the entire City.
- 3.) Target natural areas and forested hillsides for restoration planting projects.
- 4.) Ensure there is sustainable funding for necessary levels of tree maintenance to grow newly planted trees into safe and healthy, mature trees.
- 5.) Track all new tree plantings in an accurate and reliable inventory system to facilitate the use of tree data for research purposes, project costs, maintenance needs, and to evaluate progress towards diversity objectives.

#### **Monitor the urban forest for exotic and invasive pests and diseases**

- 1.) Identify the highest level, exotic pest threats and develop strategies for monitoring, control, removals, and replanting. Strategies should include information about utilization of limited resources and methods to secure funding to prevent or deal with existing pest issues.
- 2.) Utilize existing street tree inventory data to monitor public street trees for high-priority, exotic pest threat zones.
- 3.) Educate city staff, stakeholders, and the general public about exotic pest threats and provide information about identification and treatment options.
- 4.) Create citizen watch programs to assist with early detection of exotic pests. Dovetail these programs with additional education about urban forestry issues.

#### **Protect trees and preserve their role in defining the City's character**

- 1.) Update and enforce ordinances that protect existing tree resources both on public and private lands.
- 2.) Develop a set of arboricultural standards for all work that occurs near public trees. The standards should apply to permitted work by private contractors and municipal crews who perform any type of work that may impact trees.
- 3.) Develop ordinance protection for the City's forested hillsides.
- 4.) Create clear authority with an interagency and interdepartmental communication process for inspection, monitoring, and enforcement of protection of public trees during infrastructure improvements by public agencies, or permitted work on public rights-of-way near public trees.
- 5.) Create a dedicated account for funds from remediation and fines that is strictly for funding other tree-related projects.

6.) Incorporate tree protection best management practices and examples of poor practices in a public outreach campaign.

7.) Create a private property tree protection ordinance.

# Garfield Residents Call on City to Maintain Overgrown Trees, Fix Broken Sidewalks

BY MICHAEL LYNCH



[Enlarge image](#)

*Credit Michael Lynch*

Garfield residents march down the street in an effort to draw attention to what they say are overgrown trees that are causing dangerous conditions.

Garfield residents, lead by members of the activist group Action United, marched and chanted their way down Hillcrest Street Monday calling on city officials to maintain the neighborhood's overgrown trees.

According to the group, many of the community's sidewalks have started to "crack, slant and crumble" thanks to roots growing underneath the concrete.

Residents said the sidewalks have become dangerous for the elderly, children and those with disabilities.

"I have some neighbors who would love to probably get out here and walk," Garfield resident Elrita Burton said, "but you can't because of the uprooting of our sidewalks. They're just in bad shape and we really need the help."

Activists say they have been reaching out to the city for several months but have received no response.

"The trees here have become liabilities," said activist Bill Bartlett. "They've become neighborhood liabilities. You have children, the elderly, people that are less mobile — they can't walk down the sidewalks because the sidewalks are all broken up."

According to Marissa Doyle, spokeswoman for Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, maintenance of sidewalks is the responsibility of the property owners, but in cases where the city is responsible for damage (like when a city planted tree uproots sidewalk) residents can call the city to fix the damage.



## **Recommendations on Major Greening Initiatives to the City of Pittsburgh's Incoming Mayoral Administration**

### **Overview**

Greening of all type—from shade trees and parks to streetscapes, trails and vacant land management—has now been proven to have positive impact on local economies, environmental services, recreation, health and quality of life for urban areas. Pittsburgh has experienced dramatic reversals of its local environment from the steel mill-darkened days of “midnight at noon” to a newly emerging reputation as an exceptional place with “green” values. Yet as the city of Pittsburgh has worked to solidify its financial status, much of the work of improving the environment has fallen to local non-profits, community residents, and certain business leaders. WPC’s successful partnerships with community members, local government and counterpart organizations have been part of this effort to support and expand the city’s capability in the environmental arena. Through partnership, it is possible to accomplish high impact and large-scale improvements and even the transformation of places. This white paper identifies a set of actions that would help Pittsburgh position itself for a new era of environmental quality paired with community prosperity in a truly sustainable system.

### **Proven Techniques**

In its 81 years of existence, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) has pioneered cutting edge green strategies in the Pittsburgh region. In its early days, WPC created parklets and playgrounds in neighborhoods. Later it converted vacant lots and neglected spaces to magnificent public flower beds and urgently needed food gardens after the steel industry collapse. WPC has provided a variety of downtown greening enhancements such as hanging baskets and most recently a green wall. As the managing partner for the TreeVitalize partnership, WPC has raised \$7.8 million to match the original \$1 million investment by DCNR in the city’s and county’s urban forest. Most recently WPC has been developing and installing major green infrastructure projects to help reduce and hold storm water. During this extensive work, WPC has identified a set of changes that would help the city and its greening partners make significant improvements while building a sustainable system to sustain environmental quality.

### **Examples of Current WPC Greening Work**



**Gateway Flower Gardens:** 130 in Western Pennsylvania, including 60 within the City of Pittsburgh. Each year WPC works with over 13,000 volunteers, hundreds of partner organizations and dozens of sponsors to plant and care for the flowers on once-vacant or neglected land.

**Downtown Greening:** In 2013 WPC managed 700 hanging baskets, 400 street planters, 90 perimeter planters for parking lots, and 200 planters and window boxes for businesses. This project invests over \$500,000 per year downtown.

**Trees:** Over 19,000 trees planted through the TreeVitalize Pittsburgh partnership, including 11,200 in city neighborhoods. As the lead fundraiser and logistics coordinator for tree planting, WPC works closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County Parks Department, and Tree Pittsburgh on implementing the project.

**School Grounds Greening:** Over five years WPC worked with all 58 public schools to plant 734 trees and 10,800 shrubs and perennials. The project added 18 new outdoor classrooms, 16 food garden beds, 6 natural play spaces, 5 quiet reading areas, plus a rain garden, butterfly garden and sensory gardens. WPC raised and invested \$1.7 million from three foundations for this project with the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

**Green Infrastructure:** In the past few years we have installed various types of green infrastructure: rain gardens at school and community sites, Silva Cell tree pits for 15 trees at 5th Avenue Place, a green wall, and over 6,000 square feet of engineered bioswales in the Borough of Millvale. Our tree work has led directly to expertise in large-scale green infrastructure projects. WPC has invested almost \$350,000 in major green infrastructure projects in the Pittsburgh region.

## **Five Recommendations to Pittsburgh's New Mayoral Administration**

### **1. Support a Long Term Maintenance System for the City's Trees**

A tremendous investment has been made in the city's urban forest over the past 5 years with highly visible results. But this investment needs to be protected with a new system built around a public private partnership to care for the newly planted trees and then transfer that care to a systematic city structure that assures care for the life of the tree. This is the time to create a 20 year maintenance plan that engages key partners such as the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Tree Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission, and other urban forestry leaders. The recently completed Urban Forestry Master Plan outlined the need for these changes. This system will necessitate a thorough evaluation and upgrading of the city's forestry division, its operations, staffing, skills and equipment. This effort will also necessitate a creative approach to a dedicated funding stream for long-term care of the urban forest for the health and betterment of all sectors of the city.

### **2. Modernize City Codes & Enforcement**

The latest best management practices for greening projects of many types including tree plantings, tree maintenance, landscaping, stormwater management, parking lot and building construction and renovation, green roofs,



bioswales, permeable paving, stormwater tree pits, and green walls should be identified by the city and its partners and developed in to code. Enforcement of current codes related to tree planting and parking lot specifications is not happening. There are currently no codes for bioswales, permeable paving, and other green infrastructure projects. The new administration should prioritize working with its partners, including the WPC, to update existing code and develop new code to encourage new greening projects. The city will then need to adequately staff and train inspectors in the Bureau of Building Inspections or DPW Forestry Division to work proactively to enforce code. City Planning, the URA and any other agency charged with guiding and supporting new development or renovations of community spaces and buildings should also be fully engaged with the new codes and integrated into the review and enforcement systems.

### **3. Establish a Guiding Vision for the City's Ecological Quality of Life**

Work with key partners, such as WPC, the TreeVitalize partners, the Parks Conservancy and many other organizations involved in environmental issues, to set forward a vision of the city's commitment to greener communities as an integral component of the city's approach to citizen health, economic prosperity, livability and revitalization. The city should consider climate change, related threats such as invasive species and extreme weather and other factors as the vision is developed. Once established, this vision should guide every agency and facilitate basic processes such as contracting and development of partnership agreements. Current structures actually delay and complicate significant projects that would contribute to the city's movement toward a greener future. With a guiding vision that extends to every city department, Pittsburgh could become a leader in green infrastructure incorporated into all aspects of the urban ecology.

### **3. Develop a Systematic Process for Vacant Land Management**

Work with environmental partners to develop a new system for the short and long term care of vacant land, whether it is destined for eventual redevelopment or conversion to green space. Create a process combining the proposed land bank with private funding to "green and hold" land for eventual repurposing in line with the city's ecological vision and its new Open Space Plan. This land management system can be integrated with the ongoing effort to upgrade the city's urban forest, the need for storm water management, its efforts to anchor new development and the intent for using greening to support community vitality.

### **4. Support for Large -Scale Green Infrastructure Projects**

Work with local non-profits and public agencies such as WPC, Alcosan, PWSA, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and the Allegheny County Conservation District on concerted efforts to implement significant and high impact green infrastructure projects. Identify a set of signature projects designed to model new technologies, enhance existing assets, connect resources and communities and solve problems such as storm water flooding. The city's policies and codes should support such efforts to apply new technology and integrate a host of related needs from alternative transportation (bicycles and pedestrians), recreation interests, energy efficiencies and long-term return on investments in the public and private sectors.

## **Mission and Accomplishments of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy**

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) protects and restores exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters and healthy forests, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. The Conservancy creates green spaces and gardens, contributing to the vitality of our cities and towns, and preserves Fallingwater, a symbol of people living in harmony with nature.

To date, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has protected more than 233,000 acres of natural lands in Pennsylvania, helped to establish ten state parks, and protected or restored more than 1,500 miles of rivers and streams. In 1963, WPC was entrusted with Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's masterwork in Mill Run, Pennsylvania. WPC also enriches our region's cities and towns through community gardens and greenspaces that are planted with the help of thousands of volunteers. Major greening initiatives have been undertaken within the City of Pittsburgh through the WPC's Community Gardens and Greenspace Program including the Gateway Flower Gardens, Downtown Greening, School Grounds Greening, and the TreeVitalize Pittsburgh project.

## **Conclusion**

**This is the ideal moment to align city policies and agencies, the non-profit community, and the private sector to apply a combination of incentives, codes and related enforcement, public information and education, agency coordination and unprecedented collaboration on greening initiatives. Strengthening the effectiveness of our collaborations through the recommendations listed above will position Pittsburgh to launch a new and remarkable level of downtown, community, and regional greening as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century strategy to inaugurate the city's next great era.**