

## **Executive Summary**

A community plan is a process through which community residents and stakeholders articulate their vision of a common future. In town meetings, planning team discussions, focus groups, and surveys, members of the Highland Park community have said that they want to live in a neighborhood where:

- Quality housing exists for all residents;
- Local schools have strong ties with the community;
- Residents feel safe on their streets and in their homes;
- The community's youth have a broad range of recreational activities and venues; and
- Businesses prosper.

The Highland Park community plan represents both a product and a process. It is a framework to guide development, fund-raising, programming, and other aspects of community planning. The community plan also represents a genuine effort to enfranchise the entire community in the planning process, in which community residents and stakeholders articulate their vision of a common future.

A community plan is a working document that is molded and changed as the needs of the community change over time. The format for this document reflects the fact that, over time, the plan's sponsors and the Highland Park community need the flexibility to change their strategies as programmatic goals are achieved.

Throughout the planning process, the planning team has heard a number of issues, some that are new and some that are not new to the community. The community plan is a process of taking these issues and turning them into doable strategies with real accountability. It is a framework for small, incremental changes, that, over time, add up to noticeable change.

### **Action Steps**

It is critical to take steps that are doable and translate into tangible results. Tangible results are easier to accomplish in physical development, as bricks and mortar, but are more of a challenge in the realm of human development. One immediate step addresses the importance of youth development along with the issue of strengthening residents' ties to the community. Highland Park residents have known for a while, quantifiably and intuitively, that high school age students in the community are choosing Alderdice, Schenley, CAPA, and elsewhere over Peabody High School. The community plan team recently discovered, through our youth focus group, that, although the students are happy with their respective schools and friends, they would like to feel more tied to the community and to other Highland Park High School students. Four leaders of the focus group have identified 25 others to receive a letter to start the "Highland Park Youth Group."

Another immediate step, in the area of community health and safety, recognizes the importance of combining strategies and actions for maximum impact. The Community Development Corporation has identified a housing development strategy that targets problem blocks in the southwest quadrant of the neighborhood. The Corporation is at work on rehabbing buildings and generally upgrading the housing stock. Concurrent with these physical changes, members of a reinvigorated Public Safety Committee should launch an initiative, similar to the “U-CAN” effort undertaken on Bryant Street in the 1990’s, to make a visible community-supported statement for zero tolerance of illegal activity. In addition to concerted efforts on problem blocks, a community-wide public safety committee should support the development of block clubs as community organizing tools as well as public safety mechanisms.

Finally, recognizing the link between strength of local schools and vitality of the neighborhood, immediate steps can be taken to shore up relationships between the Fulton School and Dilworth Academy. Principals and Parent Teacher Organizations have identified areas in which the schools can benefit from community involvement, including areas such as tutoring and mentoring programs, after-school activities, and grant writing. Community institutions and initiatives, such as the St. Andrew’s Church, the Union Project, and Education Innovations, are developing ways in which the community can develop meaningful ways of augmenting and improving educational opportunities.

### **Organizational Challenges**

The goals and strategies identified in the plan provide an opportunity for the Highland Park Community Development Corporation and the Highland Park Community Club to examine their respective committee structures and work plans to address key community issues. The organizations convened a joint planning session in October of 2003 to clarify roles and responsibilities relative to the implementation of community planning strategies. At the planning session, members of Board of Directors of each organization, along with representatives of the Highland Park Community Planning Team, reviewed each strategy and participated in a group exercise to prioritize the strategies.

The successful realization of strategies will largely depend on the ability of the Community Club and Community Development Corporation to engage a broad range of volunteers. The organizations are considering a committee structure that would cross both organizations and may, in fact, result in community-wide committees, building on the broad-based participation in the Community Plan focus groups.

### **Planning Context**

The community planning process is motivated by a number of concerns. Highland Park is diverse economically, ethnically, and racially. The neighborhood houses long-term residents and renters. Institutions, businesses, and recreational areas complement the housing mix. In

addition, neighboring communities, such as East Liberty, are actively engaged in economic development activities that affect Highland Park. A community plan is an important step in both maintaining community strengths while providing a framework for inevitable development and other changes in and around the community.

To set the stage for discussion of the issues, the plan outlines the geographic, demographic, and historic context for planning. Overall, it is apparent that Highland Park is similar to its neighbors in certain ways, and quite unique in others. In several measures, such as housing type, family structure and racial makeup, Highland Park is much more similar to the City of Pittsburgh in general than it is to any of the individual East End neighborhoods to which it is often compared. In general, it appears that the demographics do bear out the perception of Highland Park as a neighborhood that includes a mixture of different household and family types, age groups, incomes, and races. Several trends unique to Highland Park have interesting implications for its future. For example, the high recent growth in youth population may bring with it growing needs for after-school activities and recreation. As further evidence of this need, participants in focus groups shared experiences and expressed their belief that a strong link exists between community health and youth development.

The community-wide survey's methodology and analysis are detailed in great detail as another tool for setting the planning context. Overall, the responses point to the importance of focused efforts to enable residents to make direct, tangible investments in neighborhood institutions, and for community organizations to help residents feel at home and part of a meaningful community-building process.

### **Fundamental Themes**

A set of basic and overarching community issues are outlined in the "Fundamental Themes" section:

- Building community within a neighborhood
- Effecting change at the local level
- Recognizing the interrelationships among issues
- Maximizing impact by combining initiatives
- Understanding the challenges of diversity and communicating effectively

### **Community Plan Goals**

Each of the seven plan areas begins with a discussion of key issues. Following the issues, the following community goals, along with accompanying strategies, are articulated:

- Improve the quality and market values of rental and owner housing throughout Highland Park;
- Improve the public schools serving Highland Park residents and residents' perceptions of those schools;

- Create a safe, drug-free community block by block;
- Develop a safe community image;
- Identify and publicize all after-school and summer programs in the community;
- Provide a broader range and greater number of recreational activities and venues for Highland Park youth;
- Create a continuous, identifiable business district; and
- Improve the image of the Bryant Street business district.

### **Plan Structure**

In order to articulate goals and strategies, this Plan seeks to sort out the issues into five key areas, clustered into physical and human development sections.

#### *Physical Development*

- Housing, Neighborhood Maintenance and Infrastructure
- Bryant Street

#### *Human Development*

- Education
- Arts, Recreation, and Youth Development
- Community Health and Safety

### **Documenting the Process**

In addition to appendices illustrating demographics and detailing the community survey instrument, a third appendix to the plan documents the public process employed for the formulation of the plan, including such items as town meeting notes, focus group discussion notes, and participant lists.

### **Implementation**

Following the outlining of physical and human development issues, an implementation chart prioritizes strategies and identifies responsible organizations to carry out strategy implementation. As this plan is being finalized, major service changes are being put into place in the City of Pittsburgh's government. Although City services will still be in place and need to be franchised to ensure Highland Park's community health, local changes underscore the need for the community to find ways to collaborate with existing programs and organizations while engaging a broad-based core of community volunteers. Community action requires a timetable, key responsibilities, and identification of resources. Action requires a strong volunteer core. And, finally, action requires a structure within which volunteers can feel and be productive.