

Introduction

The community planning process is motivated by a number of concerns. Highland Park is diverse economically, ethnically, and racially. The community 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.

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 need for an overall community plan was recognized by the Highland Park Community Development Corporation (HPCDC). Michael Johnson, Director of the Community Plan approached a series of foundations and other funding sources to underwrite the community planning process and plan production.

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It is the intention of the Highland Park Community Plan to address the needs of the Highland Park neighborhood in a manner that improves the lives of current and future Highland Park residents and to protect and enhance the prior efforts of the Community Development Corporation and Community Club.

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, which, over time, add up to noticeable change.

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. It is key 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 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

Allderdice, 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.

Finally, recognizing the link between strength of local schools and vitality of the neighborhood, immediate steps can be taken to shore up relationships among the neighborhood’s elementary Schools, Fulton School and Dilworth Academy, parents, and the community overall. 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.

The Public Process

To construct the plan and to ensure its acceptance and implementation, broad involvement in the planning process was needed. The insight and input from Highland Park residents, businesses, institutions, organizations, and other stakeholders proved vital to the development of the plan. Considerable effort was spent on seeking broad-based neighborhood involvement and keeping the participants informed of the planning process. The following outlines the steps taken to ensure broad input:

- Three town meetings were convened throughout the planning process. Highland Park residents, business owners, institutional representatives, and other stakeholders were invited to these facilitated discussions:
 - March 2002
 - October 2002
 - June 2003
- Outreach to publicize the town meetings consisted of literature drops, door-to-door contacts with community residents and phone calls to community residents. The community plan coordinator, Ed D’Alessandro, worked with community organizers from the East End Neighborhood Forum and Planning Team members to visit approximately 2,300 households to leave literature. Approximately 1,800 visits were face-to-face contacts.

This effort was undertaken to reach segments of the community that were not typically involved in community discussions, such as renters in the southwest quadrant of the neighborhood.

- While adults participated in the town meeting, a children's town meeting was held, with children drawing answers to such questions as "What should Highland Park have?" or "What do you like most about your neighborhood?"
- Following the town meeting, a document describing the community and goals was mailed to all registered voters in the community plan study area. This two-sided, 11" x 14" flyer summarizing the purpose, goals and deliverables of the community planning process in Highland Park was sent to all registered voters in the HPCP study area with the financial support of then-Councilman Jim Ferlo. This document was the result of multiple meetings with Planning Team members and was intended to represent a professional and persuasive invitation to local residents to consider participating actively in the Community Plan. In particular, it sought to answer common questions such as "What is a community plan?" "Whose plan is it?" "How long will the process take?" and "How can I get involved?"
- Office hours were held approximately eight times apiece at the Enrico's Tazza D'Oro, the neighborhood coffee shop, and Sandy's delicatessen from March 2002 through June of 2003, and twice at concerts in the "Reservoir of Jazz" series in August 2002.
- Michael Johnson collaborated with Community Connections, a project of Carnegie Mellon University that seeks to build democracy through utilization of information technology. They worked together to distribute and evaluate a survey of residents of Highland Park and portions of nearby neighborhoods in order to better understand the characteristics and attitudes of those who might participate in or be affected by the community planning process.
- "Door-knocking" for the survey was started in November 2002, when it became apparent that return rates for the random set of respondents was lower than expected. These efforts were located in the "southwest quadrant" where response rates were expected to be lowest. The community plan coordinator and a Heinz School graduate student visited over 1,100 households in this area, both those in the list of "random" respondents otherwise, supplying 800 copies of the survey and flyers explaining the community planning process as well, and made about 800 phone calls, of which 300 were voice conversations.
- Ed D'Alessandro and Michael Johnson coordinated a process by which local residents entered data from community surveys returned in paper form into the computer, as a way of including local residents in the survey analysis process. Between February and April 2003

they worked with three public high school students in Highland Park, one member of the Planning Team, and ten students at Sacred Heart School to input survey data.

- Focus groups were formed to address the issues that confront Highland Park as identified in the town meeting and survey responses. The focus groups were open to any members of the community who wished to attend in addition to town meeting participants, planning team members, and representatives from appropriate agencies and organizations. Five focus groups were convened and met twice during the planning process, once for initial brainstorming and once to review preliminary goals and strategies:
 - Housing, Neighborhood Maintenance, and Infrastructure;
 - Education;
 - Community Health and Safety;
 - Arts, Recreation, and Youth Development; and
 - Bryant Street/Commercial District.
- Following the initial focus group meetings, two additional groups were convened, to round out issues and to broaden the perspective on issues. A youth focus group, over pizza after school, and a focus group of Bryant Street businesses were both convened.
- Other plans and documents prepared for and about the Highland Park neighborhood were reviewed including U.S. Census Data, the 1950-1990 Pittsburgh Census Data, documents prepared by the Community Development Corporation.
- Michael Johnson attended nearly every HPCC meeting between February 2002 and June 2003 to give updates on the planning process. From November 2002 onwards, he distributed written monthly summaries of the community plan's progress to attendees.
- Through the efforts of Rudy Maceyko, volunteer webmaster for the Highland Park Community website and manager of the Highland Park community electronic mail list, the Community Plan was able to advertise all of its activities from June 2002 through the duration of the planning process.