

Fundamental Themes

Through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and town meetings, members of the Highland Park community have said that they want 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.

In addition to this clear vision, a set of basic and overarching themes run through the individual issue areas.

Building community within a neighborhood

One of the primary goals of any planning effort within Highland Park must be to strengthen the working relationships of the Highland Park Community Development Corporation, the Highland Park Community Club, and other organizations and institutions striving to build the community. This planning process and resultant document reflect the growing collaboration among key groups within Highland Park. Existing institutions, such as St. Andrew's Church continue to be a focus for community building.

In addition, new community initiatives are sprouting. For example, the recently established Union Project, will play a key role in creating community with a diverse constituency through a wide array of initiatives including renovating a key institutional landmark, developing arts programs and offering artist work space, providing opportunities for community gatherings, and leading volunteerism programs. Education Innovations, Inc., a nonprofit organization based in Highland Park, is developing a series of programs to complement and shore up existing educational opportunities. Recognizing that community organization may not have a great role in reforming practices during school time, Education Innovations proposes to provide the community with mechanisms to improve the quality of out-of-school time. Looking beyond Highland Park, many of the strategies outlined in this plan require identifying and securing resources, individuals, and programs that are currently outside the community. Successful utilization of these resources will require significant collaboration of neighborhood organizations.

Effecting change at the local level

Throughout planning discussions, whether in town meetings, focus groups, interviews, or informal meetings, community members have expressed a willingness to tackle the problems that face them. They spoke convincingly about problems that exist *now* and that need solutions *now*. Implementation of strategies embodied in the plan will require organizing those who have come forward, expressing interest in key issues and problems, into a core of volunteers to invigorate existing organizations and to provide much needed energy and manpower to address initiatives.

Recognizing the interrelationships among issues

In order to focus on specific issue areas, the community plan has separated goals and strategies into issue areas. However, it is important to note that separating out issue areas may be a tool for exploration but it in no way mirrors reality. The issues are, in fact, inextricable. For example, improving the quality of education in the community has as much to do with what happens outside of school hours as within. Schools cannot achieve high levels of teaching when children come to school unprepared to learn. As another example, new affordable housing in the community must be accompanied by support for first time home buyers to be responsible homeowners and neighbors. Human development issues are as important to the health of the community as physical development.

Maximizing impact by combining initiatives

The area of community health and safety provides a good example of 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.

Understanding the challenges of diversity and communicating effectively

The Community of Highland Park is diverse and integrated. Block level demographic analysis undertaken by Dr. Michael Johnson, of Carnegie Mellon University, and Angela Foster, of the University of Pittsburgh, shows that Highland Park has a higher level of racial integration than most of its comparison communities as well as the City of Pittsburgh over all. It much more closely resembles the City of Pittsburgh according to the diversity of its population than nearly all of its comparison communities.

Diversity can provide vitality and can also provide special challenges. The first challenge is to find a way to engage various sectors of the neighborhood in volunteer efforts, in future planning issues, and in, simply, being neighbors. For example, during the planning process, attendees of town meetings and focus groups were overwhelmingly home owners in the community. Although there is a sizable percentage of renters in the community, they were not obvious in the planning process and, in fact, do not generally participate in the existing community organizations. Whether through organizing tenant councils, or otherwise addressing their special issues, the community organizations should find a way to engage both renters and landlords in the implementation of community plan strategies.