

Physical Development

Housing, Neighborhood Maintenance and Infrastructure

Issues

Impact of changing landscape of affordable housing

The dismantling of concentrations of public housing throughout the City poses challenges for urban neighborhoods. As former tenants of public housing relocate to apartments, many small landlords are not equipped to screen tenants and ensure that tenant behavior is in line with neighborhood expectations. In addition, large portfolios of poorly managed rental property remain under the control of absentee and sub-standard landlords.

Community Development Corporation role, vision, and activities

The Highland Park Community Development Corporation (HPCDC) was formed in 1992 as a neighborhood effort to improve the residential, commercial, and aesthetic character of Highland Park. The organization's primary goals have been to increase the neighborhood's livability for current residents and to make the community more attractive to new residents. The HPCDC has employed a number of strategies to realize their goals including:

- Purchasing and financing the renovation and reuse of deteriorated and blighted properties;
- Recruiting businesses for Bryant Street;
- Encouraging the restoration of Highland Park; and
- Nominating the neighborhood and the park for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Community Development Corporation views the homeownership to rental ratio as a key indicator of the community's health and strives to increase the number of homeowners in the community overall.

Need for supportive services for struggling households

An important outcome of the community planning process has been an increased understanding that human development is at least as important as physical development for the health of the community, especially in the most blighted portions of the community. For example, local residents need to be connected with social services such as support for first-time homeownership, family counseling, employment training and adult education.

Residential quality and property maintenance

Keeping properties in good repair is difficult in the face of an aging housing stock, senior homeowners with fixed incomes, first-time home owners with limited funds, and absentee landlords. As in all City of Pittsburgh neighborhoods, property owners may be unaware of available programs for property renovation and repairs. Others may be intimidated by the paperwork and requirements of the programs. And, finally, others may not know contractors

who are qualified to perform the work. Enforcement of property and site maintenance was viewed by focus group members as inconsistent across the neighborhood.

Need for coordination with efforts of other adjacent communities

There are major initiatives affecting Highland Park that are being undertaken by community organizations in adjacent neighborhoods. Highland Park, as a piece of a system of East End neighborhoods, is directly affected by the health and trends of those neighborhoods. For example, the dismantling of public housing in East Liberty has an impact on the rental and affordable housing market as former public housing tenants relocate in and around East Liberty. In another realm, the reinvigorating of East Liberty's core will have a profound impact on the health and vitality of surrounding commercial and residential districts.

Addressing property deterioration of key non-residential properties

The newly established Union Project is focused on restoring the Union Baptist Church, located at the corner of Stanton and Negley. The importance of the restoration goes well beyond the need to house the activities envisioned by the Project. Located at a key gateway to Highland Park, the refurbished building will be a highly visible catalyst for neighborhood revitalization on a larger scale.

Integrating housing providers into the community

The building stock of Highland Park lends itself to a variety of housing and is particularly appealing to group home and other institutional uses. The neighborhood has had to face the challenge of integrating these different housing models, the providers and the clients, into the community. In some cases, usually where the provider is sensitive to neighborhood maintenance and behavior issues, the integration has been a seamless one. In other cases, the facility/neighborhood relationship has been a difficult one.

Goal: Improve the quality and market values of rental and owner housing throughout Highland Park

Strategies:

- Develop a comprehensive housing strategy for Highland Park
 - Expand Highland Park Community Development Corporation (HPCDC) three-year development plan
- Focus efforts on improving housing of southwest quadrant
 - Bring housing and community health and safety measures together for concerted effort; engage community volunteers

- Address deteriorated properties being rented to problematic tenants.
- Address key non-residential deteriorated properties, such as the Union Baptist Church.
- Market the neighborhood
 - Expand effort of Highland Park Community Club to centralize housing information; coordinate with HPCDC marketing program
- Encourage home ownership to stabilize the community
 - Utilize existing programs for home ownership counseling
 - Support and expand home acquisition and maintenance programs
- Continue zoning enforcement
- Encourage maintenance and beautification
 - Reinstate block clubs; broaden focus to include beautification as well as safety; institute a window box program
 - Utilize the community newsletter to identify “beautification of the month”
 - Provide volunteer assistance for seniors to address property care; coordinate with new-to-form Highland Park youth group
- Develop and publicize measures to address nuisance properties

Physical Development

Bryant Street Commercial District

Issues

Marketing Bryant Street

Currently, those who work closely with the Bryant Street business district recognize areas that need to be strengthened. The business district needs to market itself so that the community is made aware of the businesses available to them. The community also needs to support the development of more businesses that serve the needs of the community. Bryant Street should build on a mix of locally-oriented and “destination” businesses. It is clear that Highland Park residents respond to, and patronize, quality businesses. Therefore, the District should simply be marketed to “successful businesses.” The area could be marketed as an attractive alternative to higher rent districts in nearby neighborhoods, such as Walnut Street in Shadyside. Finally, effective marketing of the area needs to rely on a current, working knowledge of available space in the business district along with a thorough knowledge of resources available to business owners for improving their properties.

Image and Infrastructure

Merchants agree that, through concerted efforts of the Highland Park Community Club and Community Development Corporation, safety on Bryant Street has greatly improved. However, they also agree that better lighting is essential. Although successful businesses exist off of Bryant Street, it will be critical to contain future growth to the Bryant Street corridor and existing satellite businesses.

Goals:

- **Create a continuous, identifiable business district**

- **Improve the image of Bryant Street**

Strategies:

- Renovate dilapidated buildings
 - Focus renovation efforts on center portion of business district
 - Assist with funding for façade renovation
- Focus commercial development on Bryant Street Corridor
 - Limit non-conforming uses
 - Reexamine zoning district boundaries in support of retained commercial district
- Increase visibility of district
 - Develop markers at entrance to street from Negley and Highland
 - Improve existing banners
 - Improve lighting on street
 - Improve snow removal, trash removal and other maintenance issues
- Facilitate creation of merchants’ association

- Address issues such as night lighting, special hours, and joint events
- Collaborate on marketing, safety issues, and fundraising
- Recruit prosperous, appropriate businesses
 - Identify and recruit
 - “Stand-alone” businesses that would bring their own clientele
 - Services and goods that are missing from the community, such as groceries, family restaurant, etc.
 - Professional offices
 - Businesses that could capitalize on what’s already prosperous there
 - Businesses that could appeal to youth market
 - Create/provide formalized information to interested businesses, including demographics, available properties, etc.