

THE FUTURE OF TARENTUM

Residents, business owners and community stakeholders began the formal process of participating in the reformulation of the comprehensive plan on May 5, 2006. At that time, more than 100 surveys were filled out which answered the following questions: What do you believe are the assets and strengths of Tarentum as a community? What do you believe to be Tarentum's major problems and weaknesses? What do you believe to be Tarentum's specific community needs?

In terms of assets and strengths, residents felt that the Police, Fire and EMS services stood out from those in other communities. Those items were followed by people and neighbors, parks and playgrounds, the street department – particularly cleaning and snow removal; the riverfront, the town's close proximity to Route 28, geographic location overall, proximity to the Pittsburgh Mills Mall, and affordability.

In stating what they found to be major problems and weaknesses, business owners and residents said vacant or deteriorating land and buildings were at the top of the list; followed by the need for new business, parking, street and sidewalk repair, stray dogs and cats, lack of pet cleanup, absentee or slum landlords, lack of areas for children and teens to play, high taxes, utility bills and fees, drugs and crime, and street cleaning.

In defining specific community needs, survey participants indicated the need to attract new businesses by offering incentives, instating landlord accountability, instituting more programs for children and teens, new recreation areas and programs for all ages, riverfront recreation expansion, more parking and the inception of parking permits, acquiring and demolishing or renovating vacant buildings, providing incentives for existing or new homeowners to rehabilitate their structures,

maintaining clean streets, and increasing police visibility.



On October 11, 2007, more than 75 residents, former residents, business owners and interested activists from neighboring communities gathered at First United Presbyterian Church on Lock Street to discuss their vision for Tarentum's future through the year 2019. This first public meeting began with a presentation which detailed items in place to begin the process of compiling material and researching information to be contained in the Comprehensive Plan. These items included grant monies made possible for the comprehensive planning effort from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, the office of State Senator Sean Logan, the office of State Representative Frank Dermody and the Allegheny County Department of Community and Economic Development. The audience was also informed that a Field View and Basic Conditions Survey of the Third Ward was complete, as well as a Field View of traffic and parking Conditions. Duquesne University's School of Law was prepared to reactivate the Pride In Tarentum group; the draft of the first newsletter had been prepared, and the 2006 revitalization survey results had been compiled. The planning process for the Comprehensive Plan was introduced, and the compilation of the Tarentum's assets and strength, major problems and weaknesses, and specific community needs was reviewed.

Parallel aspects of the issues that faced Tarentum when the last comprehensive plan was completed in 1964 were introduced, and the audience took time to comment on the similarities. The draft components for the new Comprehensive Plan were introduced, as were plans for Third Ward redevelopment, the Keystone Opportunity Zone, infrastructure, housing and Riverfront Park. Draft goals were introduced, as was a mission and vision for the project. Residents began to discuss their thoughts on the goals, mission and vision, and after some thought and much discussion, residents presented the following items and circumstances as matters to be considered for inclusion in their new comprehensive plan:



Primary Goals:

- *Ensure rehabilitation is true to original construction*
- *Replace crumbling sidewalks and faded signs*
- *Ensure adequate room for business expansion in appropriate districts*
- *Focus on single family homes to increase the likelihood of positive home maintenance*
- *Encourage proper use of parking areas*
- *Keep road projects on schedule*



Mission: To unite the input from Tarentum’s business, residential, and civic organizations with empirical data in conjunction with historical studies conducted by the Borough to devise a plan for Tarentum’s revitalization

Vision: A self-sustaining economy in Tarentum that draws in new businesses, supports older established businesses, and is inviting to new residents

Following the establishment of goals, mission and vision; attendees began to make suggestions for items to be addressed in the comprehensive plan. Each item, more than 36 in total, was agreed upon by the residents after much discussion and several duplicate, supporting suggestions were combined to solidify these 36 items. These suggestions were taken back to the drawing table, and appropriately divided into the following categories:

- Aesthetics**
- Business**
- Housing**
- Municipal Planning**
- Parking**
- Public Facilities/Services**
- Recreation**
- Roads**



The second of three public meetings was held on March 5, 2008. During this meeting at Holy Martyrs Catholic Church on West 9th Avenue, residents took part in a prioritization exercise. Previous suggestions discussed in the September meeting were listed under the Aesthetics, Business, Housing, Municipal Planning, Parking, Public Facilities and Services, Recreation, and Roads categories. Everyone in attendance took part in a “dot prioritization” exercise. Attendees were each given a specific number of green, yellow and red dots to place on each item. The dots provided the freedom needed to express their opinions be they strongly in favor of, neutral or unsure of, or decidedly against a suggestion on the wall charts. Wall charts contained every suggestion provided in the first meeting. Residents also had the opportunity to suggest a few more items that were not provided at the September meeting. The following are the results from the March 5, 2008 meeting:

Aesthetics

Ensure Rehabilitation is True to Original Construction

Residents expressed an overwhelming sentiment to either preserve or restore the unique architecture inherent in the community. Working closely with Urban Design Associates and the Pennsylvania History and Landmarks Foundation several months after this meeting, they had the opportunity to see what select

buildings in their commercial district would look like if they were restored to their original glory. Many of the buildings, particularly in the commercial district, have been the subject of period specific additions over the years. Therefore, some beautiful Victorian structures have been outfitted with aluminum siding storefront extensions, and the character of those once uniform buildings is more accurately assessed as a random assortment of structures reflective of the period in which the buildings were adapted for their latest use.

Ensure Redevelopment Blends and is Uniform in Appearance

In much the same spirit as ensuring rehabilitation remains true to original construction, residents expressed the need for building refacements to blend and have a deliberate, coordinated appearance in the midst of preservation efforts.

Replace Jersey Barrier with a Simple Divider on Sixth Avenue

A small cohort of residents felt that the Jersey barrier was a cold and visually unappealing method of diverting traffic and would prefer another method such as a guard rail style barrier or planters.

Sidewalks Must Be Replaced

Residents made mention of the condition of sidewalks in random areas of the Borough. The Borough Manager noted that a sidewalk replacement program was already underway and several areas had already received new sidewalks. The sidewalk replacement program includes both cement and brick sidewalks.

Faded Street Signs

A few residents felt that street signs and signs noting the location of landmarks in the Borough were faded, lacking visibility and in some cases, uniformity. As of the time of this public

involvement session, more than \$20,000 had already been spent on the replacement of signs within the past five years.

Business

Ensure Adequate Room for Business Expansion in Appropriate Districts

Recognizing Tarentum's status as an older, established borough with a finite amount of developable land, particularly in the Borough's business districts; residents have requested that the Borough ensure that its zoned areas are being appropriately used and vacant or substandard buildings be acquired and demolished.

Focus on Current Major Employers in the Area and Their Desire for Expansion and Relevant Location



Residents noted there are several businesses who they feel are valuable members of the community. These businesses have almost unanimously demonstrated a vested interest in the community, and are commonly owned by Tarentum residents or individuals who grew up in the community. As Tarentum is an older, established community with a clearly defined, landlocked business district; space for expansion and development is not easily located and most definitely at a premium. Residents want to ensure that everything that is possible will be done to allow the Borough's

businesses to expand, develop, and relocate within the Borough as necessary. Efforts are currently underway to allow for expansion and relocation, and the Borough has indicated a positive relationship between the local government and business owners who are thriving and growing despite the current economic downturn.



West 7th Avenue gives People the Wrong Idea about Tarentum – Great Area for a Rehabilitated Business Zone

The West 7th Avenue Corridor is a Tarentum's secondary business district. Both residents and Borough officials are currently displeased with the state of the corridor, which contains a discordant assortment of businesses, vacant buildings, and crumbling residences. Borough officials and residents alike both expressed the desire to remake West 7th Avenue into a municipal service district – complete with Borough offices, a community center, police and fire stations, and plenty of green space to join the complexes.

Make Tax Credits Available for Emerging Businesses

Residents expressed interest in the opportunity or possibility of establishing relief for businesses who choose to locate within vacant or newly constructed storefronts. They felt that the ease of traveling to Tarentum from surrounding

municipalities has not been properly marketed, particularly to the high volume of workday commuters utilizing the Tarentum Bridge. They also acknowledged the challenge presented by the new Pittsburgh Mills development to Tarentum's shopping district, but feel that personalized service and specialty stores not supported by a shopping mall environment can and do thrive, and are sought after commodities in Tarentum.

Focus on Single Family Homes to Increase the Likelihood of Positive Home Maintenance

This suggestion was made while discussing both the business and housing categories. In reference to the business category, attendees acknowledged that many access points to the business community were lined with residential structures. The condition of these structures, many felt, set the tone for how business owners, who may or may not live in the community, feel motivated to care for their property. Likewise, they feel more business owners would be likely to maintain the appearance of their businesses if the surrounding residences were in pristine condition.

Determine Accessibility of Keystone Opportunity Zone for Development

Some residents recognized the inherent possibilities in developing Tarentum's Keystone Opportunity Zone, located on the hill on the opposite side of Route 28, overlooking the Borough. It has been noted that developing that plot of land is difficult due to the steep terrain and difficulty in navigating equipment to excavate and level a lot suitable for development, in addition to the difficulty associated with installing sewage service and roadway up the hill to the property. As of now, plans to develop the property are on hold, but the Borough is still looking into the feasibility of several alternative uses for the KOZ.

Housing

Focus on Single Family Homes to Remedy Parking Situation

As mentioned previously, this suggestion to target single family homes to alleviate overcrowded parking conditions was made in both the business and housing sections. Insofar as it relates to housing, its intention was to reduce the number of subdivisions inside single family homes, thus reducing the necessary number of parking spaces per structure. Some larger houses, which may have been subdivided over the years, may contain as many as six or more units. These six units may contain two or more people each. Therefore, larger houses which may have contained only one family car in years past are now multi-unit apartments which may be vying for twelve parking spaces near the structure. With the potential for several multi-unit structures on the same street, one can easily see where as many as 36 cars may be fighting for space in an area where three cars may have once been able to easily park in front the former single family home. In the areas where the homes are close to the business district, alleviating the parking problem for residential housing would also make more parking available to business district patrons.

Several residents suggested the possibility of introducing or reinforcing existing subdivision codes to reduce the number of units that may exist inside a structure which formerly served as a single family home. Meeting attendees considered this to be one of the most pressing problems in Tarentum.

Pass an Ordinance That Limits The Number of Vehicles Per House

This suggestion coincides with the item above, referring specifically to homes that were formerly grand single family structures. This suggestion was not meant in any way to limit the number of cars a single family living in a

single family, undivided structure may have on their property. Attendees felt that issuing parking permits to residents of subdivided units may alleviate the Borough's parking woes.



Pass a Local Ordinance That Limits the Number of People per Bedroom Due to Over Occupancy of Rental Units

Some residents were concerned with the number of residents per unit in some of the subdivided single family houses. Residents felt that more than two people (for example, up to four children or several unrelated adults) may be living in a single bedroom. Residents felt that the number of people residing in subdivided single family units may serve as a contributor to rising crime levels, particularly in terms of narcotics trafficking and arrests. By limiting the number of inhabitants per bedroom, residents felt that some control may be regained by the community in determining the number of people allowed to cohabitate in one subdivided unit. The Borough Manager empathized with the residents' thoughts on the downside to subdividing, but did advise the attendees that such a measure would take considerably more manpower than the Borough would have to enforce that standard.

Focus On Single Family Homes to Increase Likelihood of Positive Home Maintenance

Borough residents brainstormed to determine if there might be an incentive program that could

be established by the Borough to assist single family homeowners in maintaining and rehabilitating their property. Such a program, residents thought, might create a "ripple" effect in home maintenance; thus raising the value of homes in the Borough. Several residents had noted that just one person on their street made improvements to their home, and suddenly, whole streets were taking on tasks to maintain homes and property. Residents felt that a Borough sponsored program; perhaps a small tax reduction or small prize awarded by the Borough to the most improved street, may benefit the community.

Instill Pride in Renters As Well As Homeowners

Tarentum homeowners, joined in this thought by business owners, felt that a large segment in the downturn of building conditions was due to renters living in formerly single family homes not assisting in the maintenance, or pickup, of the outside structure. Residents feel that landlords who operate these structures may frequently, although not unanimously, be absentee landlords and do not screen their tenants, have a personal relationship with their tenants, or bring on tenants with any thought as to that tenant's potential positive or negative impact on the residential neighborhood where the home is located. Residents also discussed the possibility of throwing annual block parties and making a point of inviting tenants to foster a sense of community and belonging; therefore increasing the likelihood that renters will feel a sense of belonging and a stake in the community. Homeowners feel establishing this identity in renters will boost the morale of the community and may curb transiency in some of the rental population as well.



Enforce Violation Fees and Balance with “Neighborly Kindness”

Residents and attendees strongly emphasized that they felt violation fees could be enforced in both overcrowded subdivided housing and as part of a parking permit program. The Borough Manager was on hand to discuss this possibility and noted to attendees that at the current time, there is not a sufficient number of municipal staff to support such a program. Were there sufficient funds or staff, both the municipality and residents agreed that this may be a desirable path to explore in the future.

Back Taxes Owed are an Impediment to New Owners Taking Over

As alluded to in this description, there are several properties for sale on which taxes are owed to the municipality and county. These properties are sometimes rundown, and the back taxes owed provide further disincentive for potential buyers to purchase the property. Tarentum residents would like to explore the option of potential programs that could be enacted to eliminate back taxes owed on certain properties so that they may be purchased and renovated by new owners instead of remaining vacant, causing further decay to the home, the community, and a further loss of revenue for the Borough.



Issuing parking permits to residents of subdivided units may alleviate the Borough’s parking woes

The Borough would like to consider the possibility of issuing parking permits and has examined in the past the possibility of instituting such a program. However, the Borough does not currently have additional funding to hire more staff, and the current staff is functioning at maximum capacity and could not have their tasks diverted or delayed to serve as the administrators of such a program.

Borough Spends Too Much Energy Maintaining Abandoned Property

Both residents and Borough officials alike agreed that the cosmetic exterior upkeep of abandoned property was a drain on Tarentum’s resources. The Borough Manager confirmed that township employees will mow property that is overgrown, or are sometimes called upon to cut down trees from abandoned property. This removes township staff from addressing more appropriate tasks and duties.

Municipal Planning

Possibly Outdated Zoning Laws

Residents felt that the application and enforcement of current zoning codes, in addition to the research of current codes to

determine if there are any outdated codes that could ideally be updated; would be of great benefit to the Borough.

Residential Area Should Be Integrated With/Easily Accessible to the Business District

One resident suggested that the business areas and residential areas should become more integrated. Ideas included making available and advertising loft apartments above downtown East 6th Avenue businesses. Residents overwhelmingly expressed that they wanted to keep the business and residential sections separate.

Parking

Businesses Want More Parking, and Want Those Parking Spaces Balanced With Green Space

As mentioned in previous sections, the parking dynamic in the Borough is a complicated one. There are several well designed parking areas in the Borough's central business district, but these spaces are not always plentiful enough to accommodate patrons. This situation may be exacerbated by Tarentum's position on the side of a river valley hill. Many elderly residents, who comprise a large portion of the Borough's population, find it difficult to travel distances of more than a block or two on the steep terrain. The lack of parking coupled with the likelihood of having to travel more than a few blocks on an incline make visiting some locations, such as the history museum, a difficulty for residents.



Encourage Proper Use of Parking Areas and Construct Proper Parking Spaces to Decrease Curb Wear and Maintenance

This suggestion came about due to the inefficient design of some of the spaces in the Borough's central business district, in particular. There are other areas in the Borough, such as Riverside Park, that residents also felt could benefit from parking spaces that aren't parallel and against the curb. Urban Design Associates presented some options for residents at a public meeting held on June 24, 2008.

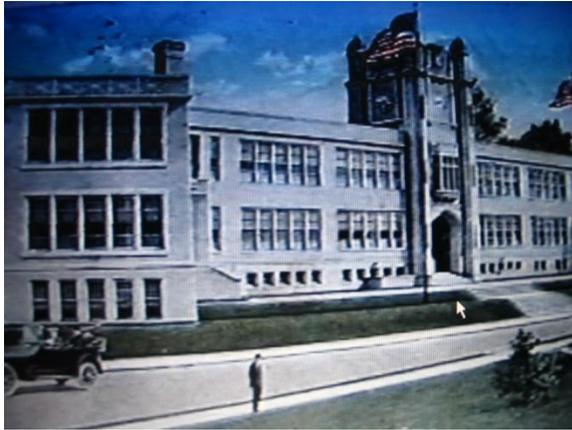
Public Facilities/Services

Need Handicapped Accessibility for Post Office/Post Office is in a Poor Location

Keeping in mind that a large portion of Tarentum's population is comprised of elderly residents, many members of the community voiced their frustration with the current location of the Tarentum Post Office. The Post Office is located on an incline on Corbet Street, and lacks handicapped accessibility. Residents are hoping that the lack of handicapped accessibility might possibly necessitate a move of the Post Office from its current location to a more accessible location, such as West 7th Avenue, in the future.



Need To Keep Elementary School to Attract New Residents



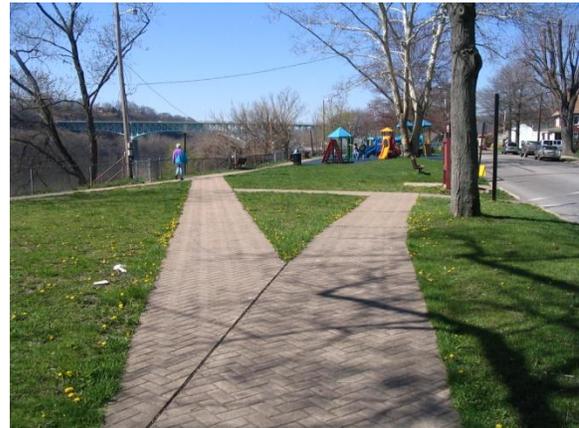
Tarentum is home to one of four elementary schools in the Highlands School District, which encompasses Fawn Township, Harrison Township, Brackenridge and Tarentum. Residents felt that in the midst of the declining population base, especially as it pertains to younger people, it is of extreme importance that Tarentum retain its Grandview Elementary School. The residents of the Borough feel it is important to advertise this commodity as they attempt to reduce subdivision and promote the affordability of its single family homes.

Competitive Rates for Tarentum Power/Facilitate the Development of Tarentum's Own Power Plant

Residents and business owners feel that by maintaining competitive rates for Tarentum Power, the municipality is offering a competitive advantage for locating within the Borough. There does appear to be some misunderstanding as to the potential for this utility arrangement, however; for as much as residents favored competitive rates for Tarentum Power, they were not interested in the facilitation of the development of the Borough's own power plant.

Recreation

Recreational Amenities Help to Fuel the Borough's Economic Engine



Residents were very much in favor of continuing to expand upon the recreational offerings already in place in Tarentum. One of the biggest community events is Earth Day, which brings businesses and residents together for a day of camaraderie, entertainment, and community service. More than 75 volunteers showed up to assist with cleaning the train tracks on Earth Day 2008, an event so impressive that a neighboring municipality also cleaned waste from the train tracks running through their municipality the very next day. Tarentum's most notable natural attraction, Riverside Park, boasts a beautiful walking trail through mature trees and green space along the Allegheny River.

Roads

It is Necessary to Aggressively Pursue Street Paving, as Roads are Deteriorating

The Borough Manager noted that more than \$180,000 has been spent on street paving in the last 10 years. He also explained to residents that the cost of street paving has dramatically increased in the current economy, with the raw components of asphalt experiencing an

exponential increase. He indicated to the residents that the Borough is on a paving schedule, although that schedule is sometimes subverted in the event of a water main break or the emergence of large potholes. In those cases, material which would have otherwise been used to pave an overdue section of roadway must go to patch a trouble spot.

Need a New Road before Bakerstown Bridge

Some residents felt that new asphalt should be laid on the road just before the Bakerstown Bridge. Attendees were evenly divided on the need for this item.



All of the items presented and categorized in the March 5, 2008 meeting were considered as elements for the draft plan; researched and put in to place. The public was gathered for a final meeting held at the Tarentum Borough municipal building on July 12, 2008. In this meeting, residents expressed the desire to consolidate ideas into workable projects, and sought clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the many organizations assisting in the redevelopment and revitalization of Tarentum. Anticipating the needs of the residents; the project scope was reviewed, a clarification of the inter-relationships and delineation of relationships was presented to attendees, the work timeline and completion of processes was reviewed,

citizen tasks and duties were outlined, and the recommendation process was explained.

The planned presentation began with a brief review of events that transpired at the October 11, 2008 and March 5, 2008 meetings; as not all attendees at each individual meeting attended all three meetings, and for some meeting-goers at the July 12 presentation, it was their first time taking part in a public information session. The facets of the comprehensive plan were discussed, as well as work completed to this point by Third Sector Development. The public input process and contributions were detailed. Attendees heard how ideas and suggestions had been digested to this point, and were consolidated, labeled and used as advised directives.

Residents were shown a diagram that explained how each of the agencies currently involved in Tarentum's quest for progress were responsible to the Borough and to each other; which agencies worked directly with one another, or were in some way called to cooperate on a particular aspect of the many projects taking place. It was explained that Third Sector was responsible for the entire comprehensive plan, which encompasses every area of every district in the Borough, minus the East Tarentum commercial district project managed by Allegheny County. The Allegheny Together, or ALLTogether program, was briefly discussed in its role to reshape specifically the Main Street business district in the heart of East Tarentum. Project borders were mentioned, to explain to residents that the County project does not encompass any residential areas outside of this district, or the West 7th Avenue corridor. The roles of Town Center Associates, Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, and Urban Design Associates were also discussed to answer residents' questions and provide them with the opportunity to understand how all of these entities were coming together to reshape the community. Attendees expressed gratitude for the clarification, and said this dialogue clarified their understanding of who was

currently working in the Borough, and to what end.

The results of the tally of the March 5th public involvement session were revealed and reviewed, and attendees commented on the results. While there was some surprise that the concept of recreation as a priority had fallen low on the list as a result of the public input gathered at the last meeting - there was no shock that Business and Housing were the two categories that rose to the top of the list. All attendees were unanimous in their opinion that these two areas of focus were paramount in the redevelopment and reshaping of the community and its image.

Residents then took part in a SWOT analysis for Tarentum's Business and Residential districts. In the Business Districts, attendees found that the Riverfront was a draw, that its location at the "Crossroads of the Allegheny" was an asset, and that the increasingly high cost of fuel was a motivator for areas residents and businesses to "stay local". As for opportunities, attendees saw the intact train track system as opening the door for the possibility of commuter trains; that keeping people local would allow for the possibility of entrepreneurs to invest in smaller businesses, like dry cleaning stores and daycares; that the scheduled leveling and redevelopment of West 7th Avenue, with time and patience, would allow for the construction of a municipal complex to revitalize that corridor; that the riverfront development zone is "useable" for the community; and also cited the existence of the Keystone Opportunity Zone as an asset.



Weaknesses identified included the disjointedness in the design of the Borough, with Route 366 and the Tarentum Bridge bisecting the Borough and its business district; the feeling that Tarentum is not a "destination" despite several unique services and eateries; possible safety hazards with consolidation, including no "curb cuts"; and the fact that the municipality is basically "built-out", and the "the clientele determines the environment." The latter comment was made by one resident comparing the revitalization of Tarentum's business district in Oakmont, PA; drawing conclusions as to what the future may potentially hold for Tarentum.

Threats in the business district were identified as the possibility of failure for current and upstart businesses; difficulty in reaching new clientele, and establishing and reinforcing the habit of visiting Tarentum when adjacent community residents commute to run errands.

The most prominent residential strength was identified as the low cost of housing. Residents noted that a large, unsubdivided house could be sold whole to a young family at a reasonable cost in a safe, friendly neighborhood. Other housing strengths included small property plots that were easy to maintain by busy professionals, the elderly and disabled individuals; a variety of neighborhoods available with different character; neighborhoods with distinctive, timeless appeal – not a "McCommunity"; safe neighborhoods with nice parks in walking distance or a short drive; as well as a community farmer's market and summer concert series. Opportunities included the possibility of becoming a bedroom community with revitalized houses; restarting a neighborhood watch program; partnering with realtors to provide incentives or promotions to move to Tarentum, and a moderated parking program.

Weaknesses included the sale of too great a quantity of homes as rental properties without the encouragement of owner occupancy; no limit on the number of rental properties in the Borough; not knowing one's neighbors due to the high number of rental properties and the transience of their inhabitants; the current housing market slump lending itself to rental; increased drug trafficking; absentee landlords; the school district; and the playground across the street from Grandview Elementary being in a state of disrepair.

Threats were stated by attendees to be the possibility that neighbors would not be motivated to repair their houses, even if other on the street chose to make repairs – that the “ripple effect” would be nonexistent; the difficulty in rehabilitating units from subdivided houses into whole homes again; the concerted, coordinated effort that would have to be undertaken to reach out to absentee landlords and motivate them to maintain their properties; and the possibility that the business community and the housing community may not “mesh well” in the revitalization phase due to an incompatibility in the demographic draw.

This data in this SWOT analysis was collected, compiled, considered, and subsequently assimilated into the Tarentum Comprehensive Plan, along with all other data collected at each of the three public meetings. The Borough is deeply grateful to all of the residents, business owners, and interested parties who took part in the 2009-2019 comprehensive planning process.

