

Harrison-Tarentum-Brackenridge Implementable Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee No. 4 – Aug. 27, 2019

Notes

1. Key Issue discussion

The focus of this meeting was to add detail to the items on the potential Key Issues list. The consolidated summaries are on subsequent pages.

The committee's discussion about feasibility (easy-medium-difficult ratings) was limited due to time constraints.

2. What's Next?

- A. PMTR will create a Key Issues list based on Steering Committee discussions and which incorporates all input so far. May do some consolidating, revising. Will bring this back to the group at Oct. 8 meeting.
- B. Sen. Williams meeting Sept. 12, 9 a.m. at park shelter, with Brackenridge Borough building as backup.
- C. Steering Committee Meeting #5 on Oct. 8, 6:30 at Bill Godfrey's studio (20 Walnut Street, Natrona), to review Key Issues list and provide guidance.
- D. Jim to provide council updates in November. He will keep each under 15 mins and emphasize the broad outreach.

H-B-T Consolidated Community Issues/Discussion

Property deterioration (Aug. 13)	
Lack of funding for demolishing abandoned commercial properties	Difficult
Common, useable inventory of blighted property	Medium
Early intervention / proactive approach for properties not yet badly deteriorated could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with school district to take properties to sheriff's sale. • Linking investors with properties still in OK condition • Create real estate investment board • Identify properties where volunteers can make a big difference (Tarentum Action Committee volunteer group addresses problems at vacant properties or at occupied properties where need is ascertained, and permission granted) 	Medium
Process for dealing with long-term abandoned properties is cumbersome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Properties demolished via Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) get caught up in red tape because of liens. • Citizens get frustrated and don't understand why it is taking so long. Education opportunity. 	Difficult
County's side-lot program (\$1800) is available. Educate public about it	Easy
Develop a strategic approach to demolition	Easy
Enforcement of existing ordinances such as landlord licensure	Difficult
Note the delicate balance and interrelationship between blight and economic development	

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (Aug. 13)	
Emphasize events/programming/activities	Medium
Create community development corporation / development director to attract new businesses, assist existing businesses	Difficult
Get kids involved in cleanup	Medium
Operation Better Block reimagines places with eye on community and economic development, including tactical urbanist popups	Medium
Summarize assets to promote the communities	Medium
Develop a sports and recreation center as a focal point for the three communities, building on all the interest in youth sports and desire to give kids more things to do	Hard
Contact local businesses to determine their interest in expanding	Easy
Highlands Partnership is working on a lot of these same things – collaborate with them to be sure efforts are aligned	

Community Identity and Branding (Aug. 27)	
<p>There is no brand for any of the three communities nor of the area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an opportunity for a shared vision either through this plan or as a follow-up exercise between the three communities; there was a shared vision process about 10 years ago • Could the communities be like Oakmont? • Could area be a center for art? Get students and artists to live and work in studios here; promote low cost; history of engaging art students in past projects • There is no visual identity along the main streets of the communities such as along Freeport Road 	
<p>Must deal with negative perceptions of the three communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School District has a bad reputation, mostly in the past 10 years, that keeps people from moving into the area • Revive Brackenridge Avenue 	
<p>Community assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The river is an important asset for all three communities that needs to be mentioned in branding • Harrison Hills Park • Community parks • Libraries • Local hospital • Great houses at affordable prices 	
<p>Potential mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An example of regional marketing is the Alle-Kiski Sports newspaper • Consider a brochure for all three communities • walking tour • interactive map of assets and activities • treasure-hunt or Pokémon-like search game • Consider newsletters • Maybe a welcome package that gives info on community and local businesses, maybe get discount coupons from local businesses 	

Trails, Parks, Riverfront and Recreation (Aug. 27)	
<p>Create an overall plan for the riverfront:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote park continuity along the riverfront. Could include use, maintenance, programming, land use • Bikes will need to be allowed in riverfront parks. Some bike trails are on-road, but we need consistent policy/plan • Natrona has a concept plan for how to develop riverfront and connect with the community • Could we create a joint trail committee? We could get more funding than applying for grants as single municipalities 	
<p>Specific issues or considerations regarding riverfront:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions are ongoing with Allegheny County and Friends of the Riverfront to get safe riverfront access on ATI property • Lift up tree canopy, manage underbrush to allow views of the river and make it a more attractive area, while reminding mindful of the erosion control benefits of the plant material • Strive for more river access, residents want to be able to go fishing and watch the river - yet municipalities are worried about liability 	
<p>Capitalizing on potential of riverfront:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the availability of existing kayak launch • Create a map of the riverfront, maybe showing nearby attractions and businesses with a “you are here” feature for orientation 	
<p>Other recreation matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together recreation boards and improvement groups so their work is coordinated – want to avoid conflicting programs • ATI took over open space for a temporary parking area. Would like to return that to green space with maybe a ballfield • Help promote and partner with Fleatique on third Sunday of each month from May to October – has 200 antique vendors and tours of the mine – fund-raiser for historical society • Natrona Heights has limited park facilities, no playground 	

School District (Aug. 27)	
<p>Performance and reputation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circular and self-reinforcing problems: difficulty attracting residents > vacant/dilapidated housing stock turns people away > lower quality of school district > difficulty attracting residents • Low school rating vs. nearby public schools, with low test scores • Declining enrollment • Concerns about whether the administration and board will be able to overcome district's financial and performance problems 	
<p>Student needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern with drug use in schools • Unusually high percentage of kids having social challenges • Can students be incentivized on testing, to encourage performance? 	
<p>Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very little interaction between elected officials of the municipalities and school district: Chuck is one of the few that attends school board meetings regularly, and no school board members come to municipal meetings. • Consider inviting school board or superintendent to municipal meetings to initiate a dialogue • There have been some town/school initiatives that have involved students on community improvements projects, like planting trees 	
<p>District focus, goals and achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should district shift focus away from college prep to skilled training jobs? Annual event in April brings prospective employers to students (often skilled labor jobs) • There are positives too, such as great music program. Could community do more to help publicize success stories as part of branding? 	

Shared Services (Aug. 27)	
<p>For the most part, sharing services remains a politically difficult proposition although small initiatives have been successful.</p>	
<p>Possibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share water service? (Like the sewer authority) • Share zoning and code enforcement? (Each municipality has staff that have a specialized skill would be beneficial to bring staffs together) • COG has purchased paving equipment, and municipalities share it • Public information officer • Planning and managing riverfront trail and park • Blight strategies • Economic development • Coordinate recreation programming, possibly joint recreation director 	
<p>Difficulties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably it's politically impossible to entertain shared police and fire • Harrison Township may not be interested in shared services with Brackenridge or Tarentum 	

Infrastructure (Aug. 27)	
Roads are in bad condition and seem to get worse faster than they can be resurfaced.	
Like everywhere, combined sewers and old failing sewers are a problem; Brackenridge has redone many of their sewers. Communities are under EPA consent decree to repair broken sewer lines that let large amounts of ground water into the combined sewers.	
Need to do more to divert and infiltrate stormwater	

Public Transportation and Connectivity (Aug. 27)	
Port Authority service levels – frequency, routes, stops. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Port Authority bus service now is the “Flyer” to downtown Pittsburgh. • Highlands Partnership Network has been advocating for restoring bus lines, increasing service 	
Other initiatives striving to fill some gaps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegheny Family Network has funding for a very occasional bus loop to get people to their offices for GED classes. Runs Tuesday and Thursday, grant was recently extended – opportunity for expansion? • Hospital is part of the conversation trying to get patients to the hospital and for residents to return home after an appointment 	
Creative options for transit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could there not be a commuter rail to Pittsburgh? • What about water taxi (suggested in key person interview) 	
Other connectivity issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-way section of Mile Lock Lane in Brackenridge makes it difficult to turn left into Natrona – Council has explored ways of acquiring land to complete the road without success 	