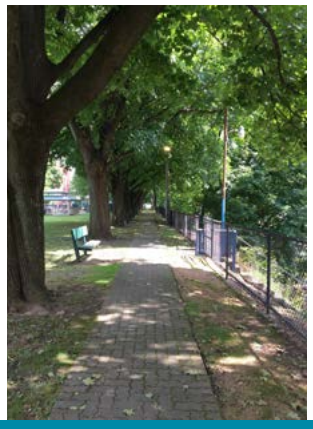
HARRISON
BRACKENRIDGE
TARENTUM



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Forging Our Future

2020

PASHEK MTR

Draft 2020-09-14

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Natalie Cajka Cale	Harrison	Trails, Parks, Recreation
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PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Harrison

Commissioners

William W. Heasley, Chairman
Gary Meanor, Vice-Chairman
Gary J. Lilly
Charles Dizard
Eric Bengel

Rich Hill, Manager

Planning Commission

Cody Nolen, Chairman
Scott Slezak, Vice Chairman
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Brackenridge

Council Members

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John Stanzione, Vice President
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Dino Lopreiato
Verne Petz
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Thomas Kish, Mayor

Tarentum

Council Members

Scott Dadowski, president
Erika Josefoski
Lou Ann Homa
Carrie Fox
Adam Blythe
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Planning Commission

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Funding and Collaboration

PASHEK MTR
Landscape Architecture | Community Planning | Design

Work on this Implementable Comprehensive Plan was funded by Harrison Township, Brackenridge Borough and Tarentum Borough, and through a grant from Allegheny County. Pashek+MTR served as planning consultant.

HARRISON, BRACKENRIDGE AND TARENTUM, FORWARD TOGETHER

The three northernmost communities along the Allegheny River in Allegheny County are in a position to forge a future that capitalizes on their location, assets and ambition for change.

SUMMARY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Forging a Future

Harrison Township and Brackenridge and Tarentum Boroughs used to be "steel towns," but over several decades lost that identity along with a significant portion of their population. From those painful losses now arises a new ambition to forge a future. Community pride is bubbling up in the form of social entrepreneurship, small businesses, the steady presence of some larger industries, and a recognition that the communities' location along the Allegheny River presents an opportunity to layer new personalities and character traits upon the old.

The communities have recognized, as residents repeatedy stated during public input for this comprehensive plan, that with concentrated effort, they are positioned to move forward together to accomplish the changes that can enhance the quality of life for existing residents and draw newcomers.

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum hope to build on their assets, including affordable real estate, their location along the Allegheny River, well-maintained local parks and an Allegheny County Park, some anchor businesses and industries, traditional business districts and bikeable, walkable neighborhoods. They also hope to welcome and guide change through efforts springing from community planning and several concurrent initiatives.

The three communities share an identity as members of the Highlands School District, and geographically as the northernmost communities in Allegheny County.

They share problems as well; years of declining population, job loss and business disinvestment have caused vacancies, property deterioration, and the social ramifications of poverty. The communities recognize that these problems do not halt at municipal borders but occur in all three. The communities' best chances for pursuing solutions to these problems and to build on strengths will be to work together to foster change and forge a new future.

The four Key Issues that community stakeholders chose to address via this plan are:

- Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development
- Property Deterioration and Blight
- Trails, Parks and Recreation
- Community Identity.

What propelled this plan

Elected officials and staff from Harrison Township expressed an interest in using the Implementable Comprehensive Planning process to improve Harrison Township and Brackenridge and Tarentum Boroughs. They were looking for a very focused approach to solving challenges facing the three communities. Their hope was also for the planning process to investigate opportunities where the three municipalities could work together to reduce costs or increase services to residents The three communities secured a planning grant from Allegheny County Economic Development (ACED) to partially fund the effort.

ACED and its planning division as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), which oversees planning at the state level, vigorously encourage multi-municipal planning and cooperation as a way of maximizing resources and enhancing community capacity.

Joint approaches, such as collaborating on planning and projects, will better position the communities to apply for funding from private or public sources. Joint approaches also respond to DCED and ACED expectations for multi-municipal planning and cooperation as a way of better serving the communities and residents.

Public Engagement

STEERING COMMITTEE

The project's joint steering committee met nine times between Feb. 12, 2019 and Aug. 26, 2020. The committee's responsibilities included assistance with:

- Generating a questionnaire
- Seeking information from residents via pop-up surveying
- Interacting with residents at the public meetings to collect their input
- Distilling input and helping to generate the Key Issues
- Working in small groups to interview and discuss issues and solutions with experts from the state and region on those topics.
- Reviewing and prioritizing potential strategies to identify the most feasible and promising options
- Reviewing chapters from an earlier draft version of this report
- Initiating implmentation, including property condition mapping, and enlisting a local non-profit to be a CDC
- Answering questions from their communities' Planning Commissions and elected officials, and advocating for plan adoption.

QUESTIONNAIRE

More than 600 people responded to the questionnaire, most via digital platform and about 30 via paper forms.

The top four areas of concern were (1) Drug issues/Crime, (2) Dilapidated Buildings, (3) Emergency Services, (4) Streets and Roads.

Several of our steering committee members conducted "pop up" events and interviewed people at the YMCA and the Library for this plan.

PUBLIC MEETING 1

The project's initial public meeting took place June 3, 2019, at the Salvation Army gym. Approximately 80 participants generated 140 ideas on things that could be improved and 50 things they thought were positive aspects of the communities/strengths to build on.

KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Based on contacts provided to us by the steering committee Pashek+MTR interviewed 21 people from the area. People included: developers, bank managers, non-profit directors, members of the faith community, business owners and municipal staff.

OTHER PUBLIC INPUT

The steering committee met with Pennsylvania State Sen. Lindsay Williams on Sept. 12, 2019, to discuss this planning process and to seek her help in identifying opportunities for public funding.

CHECK-INS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

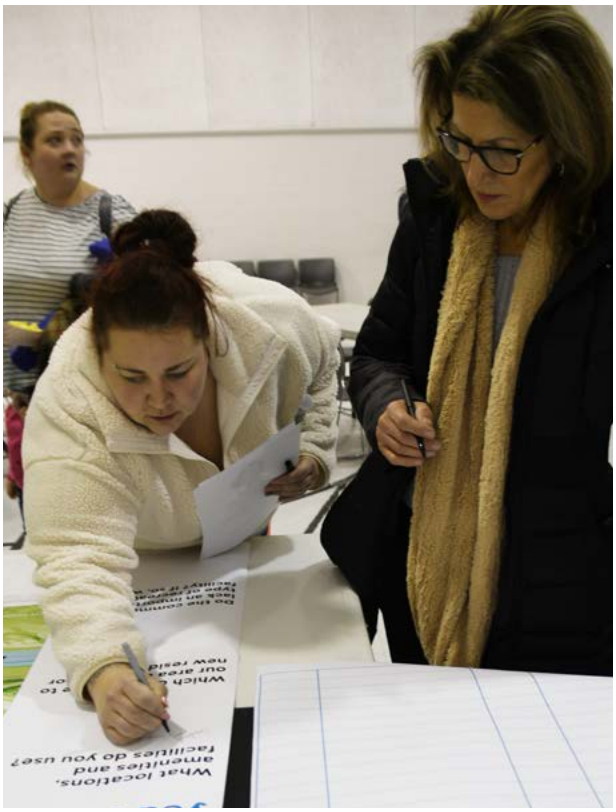
After identifying and defining the four Key Issues that the comprehensive plan would address, the consultant attended regularly scheduled meetings of the three communities' governing bodies to review the process so far and answer questions.

PUBLIC MEETING 2

The second public meeting, held Feb. 17, 2020, at the Salvation Army gym in Brackenridge, was a check-in with residents after the Key Issues were developed and some early ideas for solutions were sketched out. This meeting also served as an additional round of input, because the format asked residents to contribute ideas toward solutions to specific problems.

Sen. Lindsay Williams and Rep . Frank Dermody attended. Both povided supportive remarks about the comprehensive planning process and the plan's goals for community improvements.

Residents at the second public meeting consider elements of a riverfront improvement plan for Natrona and add comments



Residents at the second public meeting review a recreation resources map and note what facilities they use or would like to have.

The Key Issues

One of the important concepts of an Implementable Comprehensive Plan is to: (1) focus the plan on real issues as identified by the community and , (2) match the number and types of issues to the capacity of the communities to implement the recommendations. Too often, earlier plans identified hundreds of recommendations that simply overwhelmed even the best-intentioned municipal staff. Through careful listening and much discussion with an active steering committee, we arrived at the following key issues.

The input from residents from all sources – public meetings, a community questionnaire, steering committee guidance and key stakeholder interviews – was collated and counted by topic. The consultant categorized all the "Problems To Solve," "Strengths To Build On," and used frequency and degree of vehemence to begin to identify themes and priorities.

The topics that emerged as priorities are called "Key Issues."

The Four Key Issues in Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum

a. Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development
b. Property Deterioration and Blight
c. Trails, Parks and Recreation
d. Community Identity

History and context lie behind each Key Issue. These matters didn't emerge overnight as issues in the communities, and didn't become priorities suddenly. Rather, both problems and strengths have developed over time, often over decades. The implementable comprehensive plan report delves into the complexity of each Key Issue, assessing its components.

Considering best practices and Key Issue solutions

The Steering Committee for this comprehensive plan process divided into small groups aligned with each Key Issue. Each group researched best practices and potential solutions to gain an overview of possible next steps. This would help the group determine what strategies might best apply in Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum, and align with community needs and capacity.

Steering committee members meet with Jessica Trimble (center), a local government policy specialist with DCED.

- The Social Enterprise, Comunity and Economic Development team met with Jessica Trimble, a Local Government Policy Specialist with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The group had an initial meeting via conference call and then hosted her for a field visit and in-person brainstorming meeting about what DCED programs might align with community goals.

- The Property Deterioration and Blight team met with two specialists affiliated with the Pennsylvania Housing Alliance: Andrea Mannino, Senior Advisor, Policy and Practice, and Winifred Branton, of Branton Strategies, which provides policy guidance in a legal context for communities working with the Housing Alliance. This team also met with Amanda Settelmaier, Executive Director of the Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments, who has developed a code enforcement database.
- The Trails, Parks and Recreation team met with Kathy Frankel, Recreation and Conservation Manager, Southwest Regional Office of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The conversation provided an overview of how DCNR strives to support local community improvements with technical and funding assistance.
- The Community Identity and Branding team met with Brenda Armstrong and Asaka Narumi from Visit Pittsburgh, to hear how that organization seeks to reflect the character of the Pittsburgh region in strategic communications. The team also met with representatives of New Sun Rising, a non-profit organization based in the Tri-Borough area along the Allegheny River, to learn how it supports sustainable economic and community development.

Along with ideas discussed with the state and regional professionals, the consultant developed a list of potential strategies the communities could undertake. The steering committee then chose the strategies it considered to be most important and most feasible, and ranked the strategies in order of those they felt most strongly that their communities should pursue.

The Key Issues and Strategies for Making Change

The implementable comprehensive plan report provides chapters for each Key Issue, presents history context and background, and lists the recommended strategies the communities should employ to address problems and build on strengths. The highest priority strategies include step-by-step guides for implementation.

By contrast, this summary is a condensed version of the full implementable comprehensive plan report. It presents abridged versions of the descriptions and background of each Key Issue and provides a list of the strategies aimed at solving specific problems, but does not include step-by-step detail. The idea behind this is to provide two levels of detail for readers or users of the plan who have different levels of involvement and interest.

These Key Issue summaries are provided on the following 10 pages.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, COMMUNITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Key Issue Overview

Business development, job growth and social entrepreneurship together create a more stable local economy, which will make the communities a better place to live. Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum can pursue strategies listed in this chapter that capitalize on their assets, such as some strong existing anchor businesses and industries, a local volunteer corps, interesting old buildings, traditional walkable business districts, the Allegheny River, and relatively affordable real estate.

Looking Ahead

Social enterprise, community and economic development goals can best be met through a coordinated effort among the communities, in collaboration with existing businesses and non-profit organizations. Efforts to create development opportunities should:

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum thrive at individual and community scales.They address disinvestment methodically, and align continuing efforts with objectives and goals developed collaboratively among the three communities and with existing businesses, institutions and non-profit organizations. The communities continuously respond to existing community needs and capitalize on strengths.

- Align with community development objectives, goals, strategies, master plans and/or programmatic initiatives common to the three communities.
- Be developed jointly among the communities, sharing efforts and services to the greatest degree feasible, and including a community/economic development organization to provide leadership.
- Support the intention of creating and maintaining visually attractive communities, and align with a related multi-municipal effort to address commercial and residential property deterioration and blight. Redevelopment of deteriorated properties can interrupt a vicious cycle.
- Whenever possible, support local entrepreneurship and small business. Additionally, involve

and include existing businesses and established community institutions and non-profits, such as Highlands Partnership Network, an umbrella organization for many community groups.

- Potentially include updating the communities' zoning districts and ordinances.
- Respond to the needs of residents lacking transportation access to food, goods and services.
- Capitalize on existing assets of the communities, such as the Allegheny Riverfront, municipal parks, and a sidewalk network and other active transportation infrastructure.

High Priority Strategies

1 **Support a formation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or Economic Development Corporation (EDC) that represents all three municipalities, then methodically leverage the agency's services.**

2 **Maximize the Allegheny Riverfront as a prime community asset, as demonstrated in the concept drawings that incorporate walking and biking routes, parks, river access or views, historic neighborhoods, and connections with the traditional downtowns.**

Additional Strategies

3 Give people reasons to visit targeted areas in the three communities, through special events, holiday celebrations and other activities, and provide amenities.

4 Create and maintain a consolidated listing of commercial spaces available for the three communities, with information about "what it would take" to get the property ready for occupancy or redevelopment.

5 Identify and champion large sites that could have redevelopment potential.

6 Arrange for the EDC/CDC or the individual municipalities to provide web-hosting of the high-priority target properties for redevelopment as set forth in Strategies No. 2 and 5.

7 Align redevelopment and blight-fighting efforts, working from jointly developed priorities, goals and strategies. Begin with these areas in the community as revitalization targets, and leverage the services of the CDC.

8 Explore creating tax increment financing districts (TIFs) in specific areas of the communities to help finance redevelopment.

9 Working through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, create a Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) or Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) in Brackenridge and Harrison (perhaps the Natrona neighborhood). In Tarentum, Faith Community Partners (FCP) has initiated a Neighborhood Partnership Program.

10 Support a market study to determine the area's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

11 Review ordinances and consider changing some zoning provisions to encourage a range of development types.

12 Engage in planning for the future of the Heights Plaza.

13 Strengthen the local food system.

14 Connect all residents to affordable, reliable high-speed Internet access.

BLIGHT & PROPERTY DETERIORATION

Issue Overview

Property deterioration is a problem that crops up in nearly every community in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area, or indeed the nation. It negatively affects quality of life, community reputation, and economic growth. Addressing the problem is not easy, but it is possible, via the proven strategies presented in this chapter. Because of economies of scale and because blight doesn't recognize municipal boundaries, the problem is best addressed on a multi-municipal basis.

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum present a low incidence of deteriorated or blighted properties. They follow a jointly developed plan to remediate, demolish and/or redevelop properties in support of quality of life, public health and economic/ community development goals.

Looking Ahead

Property deterioration can best be addressed through a coordinated effort among the communities. Efforts to address property deterioration and blight should:

- Be developed jointly among the three communities, sharing services to the greatest degree feasible
- Create common definitions within the continuum of property deterioration
- Create and work from a unified, consistent and up-to-date database
- Align with jointly developed overarching strategies that include prevention and remediation as well as removal and redevelopment
- Be developed and implemented in the context of economic and community development goals and efforts
- Emphasize strategies to assist people who live in substandard housing.

High-Priority Strategy

1 **Using a multi-municipal approach, systematically pursue improvements as set forth in this chapter, overseen and driven by a multmunicipal "Blight Team." Work on addressing blight should be framed within the goals of this plan, and especially those related to economic development.**

Additional Strategies

2 Revise ordinances with provisions that assist with addressing blight.

3 Pursue collaborative approaches within the multi-municipal framework, such as code enforcement and uniform landlord ordinances.

4 Explore creating a regional land bank.

5 Assist property owners trying to make improvements.

6 Research and weigh other potential avenues for addressing blight, which are likely to be more complex but may have potential: advocate for a County Tax Claim Bureau that would collect delinquent taxes; investigate creating a Demolition Authority; cooperate with utility companies.

TRAILS, PARKS & RECREATION

Issue Overview

Recreation facilities and programs are some of the highest priority public services that contribute to community quality of life. Being outside in nature, enjoying exercise, recreation and leisure, and socializing in the company of neighbors are factors that enhance community and individual health and wellbeing.

As more people recognize the importance of outdoor and community activities, officials are increasingly considering trails, parks and recreation to be essential facilities and services directed toward meeting basic human needs.

Looking Ahead

Communities can benefit from increased community connectivity and the assets of river access, riverfront views, parkland and recreation. Next steps should include efforts that:

- Coordinate an approach to planning of park assets and use of parkland
- Coordinate recreation initiatives, programs, events and services
- Plan multi-municipal connectivity and trails within the three communities and with external destinations or routes. This network should include associated features such as wayfinding, promotion, programming, and connection with other community assets.
- Capitalize on river access and riverfront views, which potentially can be a factor for all three

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum residents can safely access places, goods, services, employment, and care through a connected network that includes walking/biking routes. The communities capitalize on the recreation and leisure potential of the Allegheny River and the availability of parks and recreation. They coordinate recreation and planning efforts in order to make the most of tax dollars and grants, and to provide the greatest possible variety and quality of services for all residents.

communities as they pursue social enterprise, community and economic development goals.

- Recognize parks, greenspace, watersheds and the river as potential learning centers.
- Embrace conservation and preservation of open space, greenspace and natural systems or potential planning for an eco-district.

High-Priority Strategy

1 **Convene a trails, parks and recreation group, and begin working on joint programs and events, and planning of public facilities and trails.**

Additional Strategies

2 Create a unified, multi-municipal approach to trail network development within and beyond the communities.

3 Create communications and volunteer engagement mechanisms for improving parks and trails and creating programs.

4 Use the riverfront development concept plan drawings presented in the "Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development" chapter to select potential public access improvements to help connect the three communities to the Allegheny River, one of the area's most important assets.

5 Review land-use maps and ordinances to identify parcels that could be acquired by their home communities, potentially with the assistance of grant funding, to be conserved for open space, future park land and stormwater management or resource conservation purposes.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY & BRANDING

Issue Overview

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum are distinctive places with rich and complex histories and an ambition to be known as convenient places to live that have a vibrant, small-town feel, affordable housing, and amenities like parks, trails, recreation options, walkability and Allegheny River views. The three communities desire to assemble a "toolkit" for communicating both to local people and to the greater Pittsburgh area as a whole. They wish to speak with one voice about the characteristics and assets they offer today and about the future the communities intend to forge.

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum attract and retain residents, businesses and investment by marketing themselves successfully through a commonly held identity or brand.

Looking Ahead

Communities share strengths, assets and challenges, many of which this comprehensive plan seeks to address. Creating a joint "identity" or "brand" should include efforts that:

- Articulate a shared understanding of the communities as they are today and as they hope to be in the next five to 10 years
- Reflect the cultural, human, historical, ecological and built assets the three communities share or plan to develop
- Support the Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum vision for social enterprise, community and economic development
- Can result in official and informal marketing and promotion efforts by the communities together or individually.

High-Priority Strategy

1 **Convene a team that can pursue the Community Identity and Branding initiatives over time. The team should include the members of the Community Identity comprehensive plan working group and new volunteers with expertise in media relations, marketing and branding. Because the Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum area's community identity may encompass new facets or features as other elements of the comprehensive plan are implemented, the team should strive to keep abreast of other work under way in the communities.**

Additional Strategies

2 Develop a "community identity" through storytelling. This is different than creating a geographic label. A community identity articulated through storytelling is a more thoughtful and inclusive process, with a nuanced product.

3 Create a community branding campaign. Following story gathering and community outreach efforts, the Community Identity team and partners will synthesize the information gathered to identify common themes about life in the community. Focus groups can help distill meaning from a collection of individual stories.

4 Create talking points for business owners, media, faith community, neighbors, and distribute them to media outlets, Visit Pittsburgh, state and county elected officials and others who can share important stories and information about Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum.

5 Create a digital and printed map identifying community assets and public amenities as well as historic locations and properties. This can service as a tool for communicating the three communities' identity and brand.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Implementable comprehensive plans focus their content heavily on "Key Issues" that the public process identified as the most important and most feasible to address in the coming years. Those topics typically warrant whole chapters for each. The public process also identified topics that either had less priority or were considered less feasible to address.

We include a section called Additional Topics to recognize the matters that arose during the public process but did not become Key Issues because they were viewed to be of lower priority or highly unlikely to be successfully addressed through the comprehensive planning process.

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

ISSUE: Lack of transportation creates and perpetuates inequity and hardship in the three communities. People in the three communities who don't have their own cars have significant difficulty getting to grocery stores or accessing health care and other needed services due to distance, topography and a lack of public transit.

Statement of support

- This comprehensive plan supports increased and improved transit/shuttle services to enable residents of Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum to access food stores, health care, goods and services, employment and recreation.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES AND HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT

ISSUE: The three communities lie entirely within the Highlands School District, but there is arrangement for sharing information or communicating between the governing bodies. This can lead to missed opportunities at best and suspicion, competition for resources and mistrust at worst.

Strategy

- Begin holding liaison meetings among one or two volunteers from each elected body. These should be held semi-annually. The first meeting should discuss:
  a. How to build collaboration among elected officials

b. Projects or ideas to explore or undertake together, such as producing a multi-municipal public festival showcasing student achievements in art, music, robotics, voluntarism, other projects.

CRIME

ISSUE: Some residents participating in the public process perceived crime to be an important problem to solve in the three communities. A review of uniform crime statistics showed that a spike in some forms of crime had occurred in the communities in 2016-17, possibly related to the opioid epidemic, but that no trend appeared to be continuing in 2018-2020. However, since even low statistical levels of crime can disrupt communities, neighborhoods and households, this comprhensive plan recommends the steps listed below.

Strategies

- All three communities should join a communications service such as Savvy Citizen, perhaps recruiting a local business to support the service on an annual basis. Use this, as well as informal social networks such as NextDoor.com, to notify citizens when emergencies occur to begin to establish an understanding that crime and public emergencies are not common.
- Create a section on each website showing incidences of crime and trend lines, and crime prevention techniques.
- Partner with the two large health-care providers to help inform residents of resources to help families and individuals who need health care or mental health care, including substance use disorders. This is listed here, since some property crimes are associated with substance abuse problems.

INFRASTRUCTURE

ISSUE: Road maintenance and improvements are crucial to all communities, and this is particularly difficult for Brackenridge, which does not qualify for some state funding due to its small size. At the same time, heavy truck traffic from local industries damages roads and is highly disruptive to the quietude of residential neighborhoods.

Strategies

- Explore creating a road impact fee for truck use on local roads.
- Consider establishing an official truck route through the communities to divert heavy vehicles away from quiet residential areas, parks and trail routes.
- Develop a list, by community, of needed road improvements, arranged by priority and road owner. In cases where projects are on more than one community's list, create a multi-municipal plan for pursuing funding, by approaching state representatives, PennDOT, Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission to elevate awareness of need.

The Adoption Process and What's Next

Review and Adoption

Allegheny County Economic Development reviewed this comprehensive plan for consistency with Allegheny Places, the County's comprehensive plan, and Active Allegheny, the County's Active Transportation Plan.

In addition, the draft comprehensive plan report was provided to neighboring municipalities and Highlands School District for their review and consideration.

The comprehensive plan in a final draft form was presented at a joint public hearing on XX/XX/2020 prior to adoption by the three communitie's governing bodies. Adoption resolutions are provided in the Appendix or are available at these URLs:

placeholder URL

placeholder URL

placeholder URL

Why action is important

- There are costs to making changes (time, money, effort), but also potential costs to doing nothing (citizen resentment, declining property values, less tax revenue and overall decline).
- Citizens expressed a need for change in the four Key Issue areas, and are expecting follow-through.
- The communities can best ensure their future viability by diligently undertaking the improvements outlined in this implementable plan.

Start-Up To-Do List

Recognizing that municipal staff members, elected officials and volunteer board members are very busy, it can help to have a summary of a summary. Therefore, this report provides a chart depicting the first things each community should do on the road to plan implementation. Work can begin on any of these in any order at any time. Some can even begin before the communities formally adopt the comprehensive plan.

This list will help guide action and focus energy. The chart appears on the next page.

START-UP TO-DO LIST

Harrison	Brackenridge	Tarentum	Start-Up Task
✓	✓	✓	Create an implementation team for this plan.
✓	✓	✓	Survey local non-profit organizations to determine whether any has the interest in and capacity for serving as an Economic Development Corporation or Community Development Corporation.
✓	✓	✓	Harrison, Brackenridge, Tarentum governing boards each vote to support the EDC/CDC financially and institutionally, and determine how to leverage the agency's services.
✓	✓	✓	View the suggested locations for additional trees as depicted on the riverfront concept plans, and plant them.
	✓		Strive to end the difficult one-way traffic problem at the foot of Mile Lock Lane.
✓	✓		Discuss with ATI Corp. the possibility of the corporation's installing and maintaining a high-quality mural on the Brackenridge face of wall.
✓		✓	Improve the foot of Wood Street (Tarentum) and a pathway from Veteran's Way (Harrison) with seating and access to the riverfront for small-scale uses, such as fishing, bird-watching and rock skipping.
✓	✓	✓	Create and convene Meeting 1 of a blight team that will pursue funding, encourage code enforcement and DPW sharing, develop a legal definition of "blighted property," create an overaching strategy, and other steps.
✓	✓	✓	Hold Meeting 1 of a trails, parks and recreation group (including representatives from all three Recreation Boards and the comprehensive plan working group that has focused on Trails, Parks and Recreation, to start planning a joint event as a pilot project.
✓	✓	✓	The joint trails, parks and recreation group investigates state Department of Recreation and Natural Resources programs that encourage multi-municipal collaborations on recreation staffing, funding and technical assistance.
✓	✓	✓	The joint trails, parks and recreation group reviews the multi-municipal trails map and existing efforts, and identifies next steps for implementation.
✓	✓	✓	Create and distribute an illustrative map highlighting H-B-T assets and amenities, to underscore the communities' Identity and Branding.

Now who does what?

This report can serve as a guide in the following ways:

- ELECTED OFFICIALS - This report documents the development of the implementable comprehensive plan. It identifies the directions in which the municipalities will change, and lays out the practical next steps that will produce the desired changes. Next steps, in most cases, rest in the hands of elected and appointed officials who have the role and responsibility of initiating policies or procedures; providing funding via grants or municipal revenue streams; providing human and material resources; and lending oversight. Residents expect leadership from their elected officials, including anticipating future challenges before they become problems.

- CITIZENS - Individuals may advocate for the plan and track progress by comparing the steps listed in this report to visible changes in the community and actions taken by Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum. Citizens must take the initiative and become involved by attending public meetings where decisions are made. Citizens should take an active role by pressing for the actions and policies listed in this plan, which are designed to create change in the three communities. Citizens also can support and propel change by volunteering for committees or for special initiatives.
- COMMUNITY OR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP. - Once established, this organization will play a crucial role in initiating and supporting some of the recommendations set out in this comprehensive plan. A CDC or EDC that is partly funded by the municipalities can help to lead and implement.
- TOWNSHIP OR BOROUGH STAFF MEMBERS - The communities' employees will work on a day-to-day basis to develop policies and procedures; muster resources; and assist elected and appointed officials in pushing the outcomes of the plan. Staff members are in the best position to spot obstacles to progress and propose solutions.
- APPOINTED OFFICIALS - Individuals serving on the Planning Commissions should become deeply familiar with the contents of this report. These members, along with other board and commission members, should be prepared to set out an action plan, make recommendations to the elected governing bodies, and help to solve problems in order to clear the way for progress.
- STEERING COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUPS - A number of the members of the Steering Committee that guided preparation of the comprehensive plan have agreed to continue their efforts as members of implementation teams for each Key Issue. These groups need to be fully engaged in the contents of this report, for the they will have primary responsibility for identifying successive next steps and tracking progress - keeping a "foot on the gas." These groups will be responsible for collaborating across municipal lines to help implement this plan, and for communicating with the Planning Commissions or elected bodies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Name	Community	Working Group
Eric Bengel	Harrison	Blight
Robin Bergstrom	Harrison	Trails, Parks, Recreation
Natalie Cajka Cale	Harrison	Trails, Parks, Recreation
Lauren Cottone	Harrison	Community Identity
Chuck Dizard	Harrison	Blight
Beth Edson	Brackenridge	Development
Lindsay Frazier	Brackenridge	Community Identity
Bill Godfrey	Harrison	Trails, Parks, Recreation
Michelle Goetzinger	Harrison	Community Identity
Lou Ann Homa	Tarentum	Blight
Brad James	Tarentum	Trails, Parks, Recreation
Tim Kuhns	Tarentum	Blight
Dino Lopreiato	Brackenridge	Trails, Parks, Recreation
JP Marino	Tarentum	Development
Michael Nestico	Tarentum	Blight
Cody Nolen	Harrison	Development
Scott Slezak	Harrison	Development
Denise Sloan	Brackenridge	Blight
John Stanzione	Brackenridge	Development
Pat Walters	Harrison	Blight
John Waters	Tarentum	Development

PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Harrison

Commissioners

William W. Heasley, Chairman
Gary Meanor, Vice-Chairman
Gary J. Lilly
Charles Dizard
Eric Bengel

Rich Hill, Manager

Planning Commission

Cody Nolen, Chairman
Scott Slezak, Vice Chairman
Thomas Cajka, Recording Secretary
Norbert Cieslinski
Gary Kesicki
Robin Bergstom, Alt.
Michelle Goetzinger, Alt.

Brackenridge

Council Members

Timothy Connelly, President
John Stanzione, Vice President
Timothy Kolar
Dino Lopreiato
Verne Petz
Randall Elliott

Thomas Kish, Mayor

Tarentum

Council Members

Scott Dadowski, president
Erika Josefoski
Lou Ann Homa
Carrie Fox
Adam Blythe
Brian Snyder
Jim Bonner

Eric Carter, Mayor
Michael Nestico, Mgr.

Planning Commission

Dianna Roney, Chairperson
Cindy Homburg, Vice Chairperson
Rosemary Martin
Tim Rapp

Funding and Collaboration

PASHEK MTR
Landscape Architecture | Community Planning | Design

Work on this Implementable Comprehensive Plan was funded by Harrison Township, Brackenridge Borough and Tarentum Borough, and through a grant from Allegheny County Economic Development. Pashek+MTR served as planning consultant.

CREATING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: INPUT, IDEAS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The communities of Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum collaborated to create an Implementable Comprehensive Plan that tapped citizen input to develop its focus on four Key Isues.

1 CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Communities adopt a comprehensive plan to guide them toward the future they want to see in the next five to 10 years. An *implementable* plan is a variation on that, providing specific next steps to help the communities move forward along their route to change. The Implementable Comprehensive Plan for Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum is deeply rooted in community input and focuses on four "Key Issues" that residents, business owners and other stakeholders said during the public process are important to them. As a multi-municipal effort, the plan describes problems and strengths that are common to the three communities, and solutions or next steps that are best pursued jointly.

Forging a Future

Harrison Township and Brackenridge and Tarentum Boroughs used to be "steel towns," but over several decades lost that identity along with a significant portion of their population. From those painful losses now arises a new ambition to forge a future. Community pride is bubbling up in the form of social entrepreneurship, small businesses, the steady presence of some larger industries, and a recognition that the communities' location along the Allegheny River presents an opportunity to layer new personalities and character traits upon the old.

The communities have recognized, as residents repeated during public input for this comprehensive plan, that with concentrated effort, they are well positioned to move forward together to accomplish the changes that can enhance the quality of life for existing residents and draw newcomers.

What propelled this plan

Elected officials and staff from Harrison Township expressed an interest in using the Implementable Comprehensive Planning process to improve Harrison Township and Brackenridge and Tarentum Boroughs. They were looking for a very focused approach to solving challenges facing the three communities. Their hope was also for the planning process to investigate opportunities where the three municipalities could work together to reduce costs or increase services to residents The three communities secured a planning grant from Allegheny County Economic Development (ACED) to partially fund the effort.

ACED and its planning division as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), which oversees planning at the state level, vigorously encourage multi-municipal planning and cooperation as a way of maximizing resources and enhancing community capacity.

Joint approaches, such as collaborating on planning and projects, will better position the communities to apply for funding from private or public sources. Joint approaches also respond to DCED and ACED expectations for multi-municipal planning and cooperation as a way of better serving the communities and residents.

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

HARRISON, BRACKENRIDGE AND TARENTUM BY THE NUMBERS

	Harrison	Brackenridge	Tarentum	Allegheny Co.
Population (2019 Est)	10,236	3,280	4,349	
Pop. change since 2010	-6.4%	-7.4%	-4.57%	-0.6%
Land Area	7.36 sq mi	0.5 sq mi	1.2 sq mi	
Population density	1,421 per sq mi	6,560 per sq mi	3,624 per sq mi	
Median age	42.6	39.7	37.9	
Median household income 2019	$53,336	$41,858	$31,604	$59,899
Percent of pop. below poverty line	12%	17.5%	23.3 %	11.7%
Race/ethnicity (100% includes other or 2 or more ethnicities)	90% White 3.5% Black	92% White 5% Black	83% White 11% Black	81% White 13.4% Black

Statistics in isolation don't always convey a lot of meaning. But all three show higher incidences of poverty than in Allegheny County as a whole. Also, the communities' small size in terms of population and their population decline ssuggest they are likely to be stretched financially to serve their populations.

Joint approaches, such as collaborating on planning and projects, will better position the communities to apply for funding from private or public sources. Joint approaches also respond to DCED and ACED expectations for multi-municipal planning and cooperation as a way of better serving the communities and residents.

Public Engagement

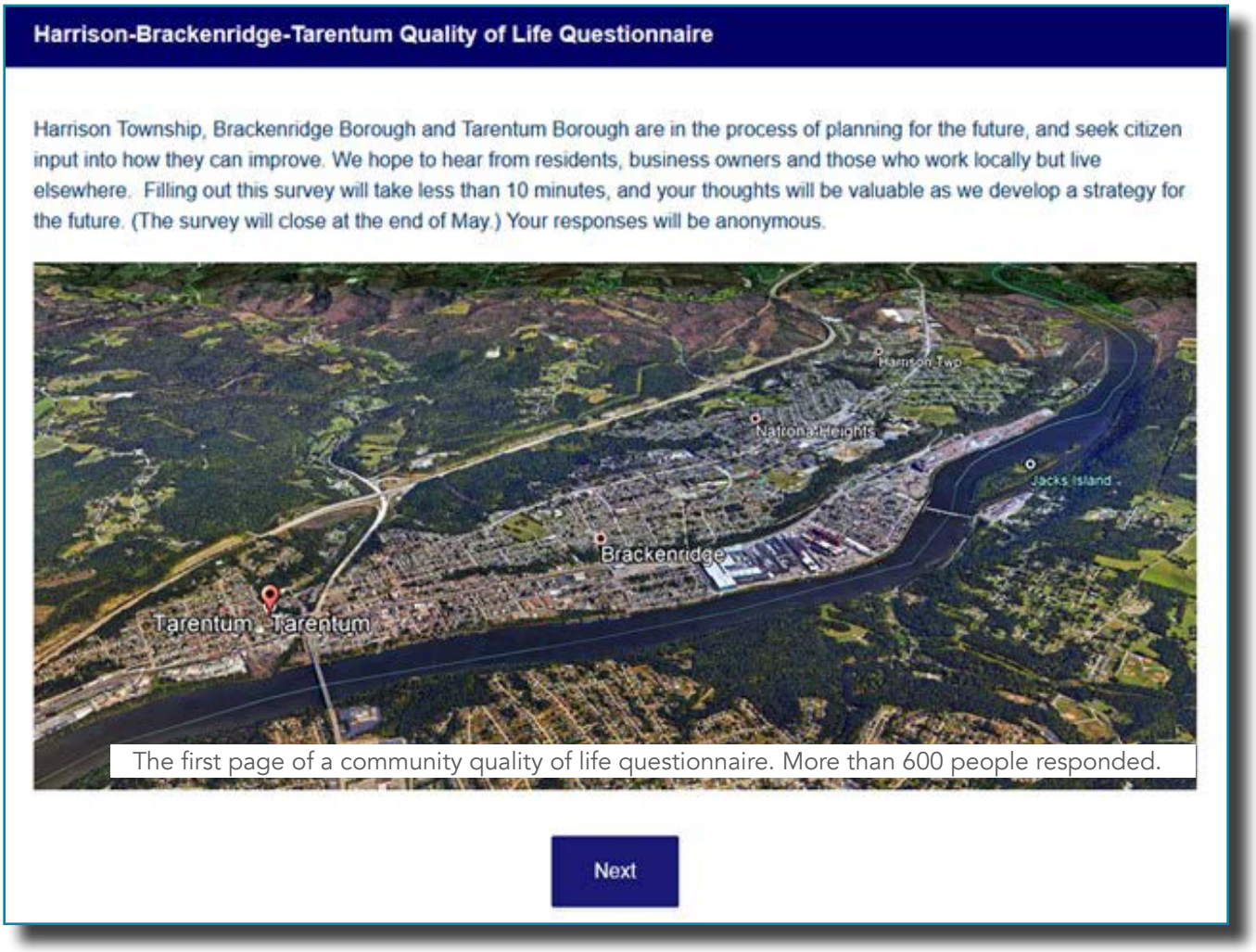
STEERING COMMITTEE

The project's joint steering committee met nine times between Feb. 12, 2019 and Aug. 26, 2020. The committee's responsibilities included assistance with:

- Generating a questionnaire
- Seeking information from residents via pop-up surveying
- Interacting with residents at the public meetings to collect their input
- Distilling input and helping to generate the Key Issues
- Working in small groups to interview and discuss issues and solutions with experts from the state and region on those topics.
- Reviewing and prioritizing potential strategies to identify the most feasible and promising options.
- Initiating implementation, including property condition mapping and enlisting a local non-profit to be a CDC.
- Reviewing chapters from an earlier draft version of this report.
- Answering questions from their communities' Planning Commissions and elected officials, and advocating for plan adoption.

QUESTIONNAIRE

More than 600 people responded to the questionnaire, most via digital a digital platform and about 30 via paper forms.



The first page of a community quality of life questionnaire. More than 600 people responded.

The top four areas of concern were (1) Drug issues/Crime, (2) Dilapidated Buildings, (3) Emergency Services, (4) Streets and Roads.

Several of our steering committee members conducted "pop up" events and interviewed people at the YMCA and the Library for this plan.

PUBLIC MEETING 1

The project's initial public meeting took place June 3, 2019, at the Salvation Army gym. Approximately 80 participants generated 140 ideas on things that could be improved and 50 things they thought were positive aspects of the communities/strengths to build on.

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

Based on contacts provided to us by the steering committee Pashek+MTR interviewed 21 people from the area. People included: developers, bank managers, non-profit directors, members of the faith community, business owners and municipal staff.

OTHER PUBLIC INPUT

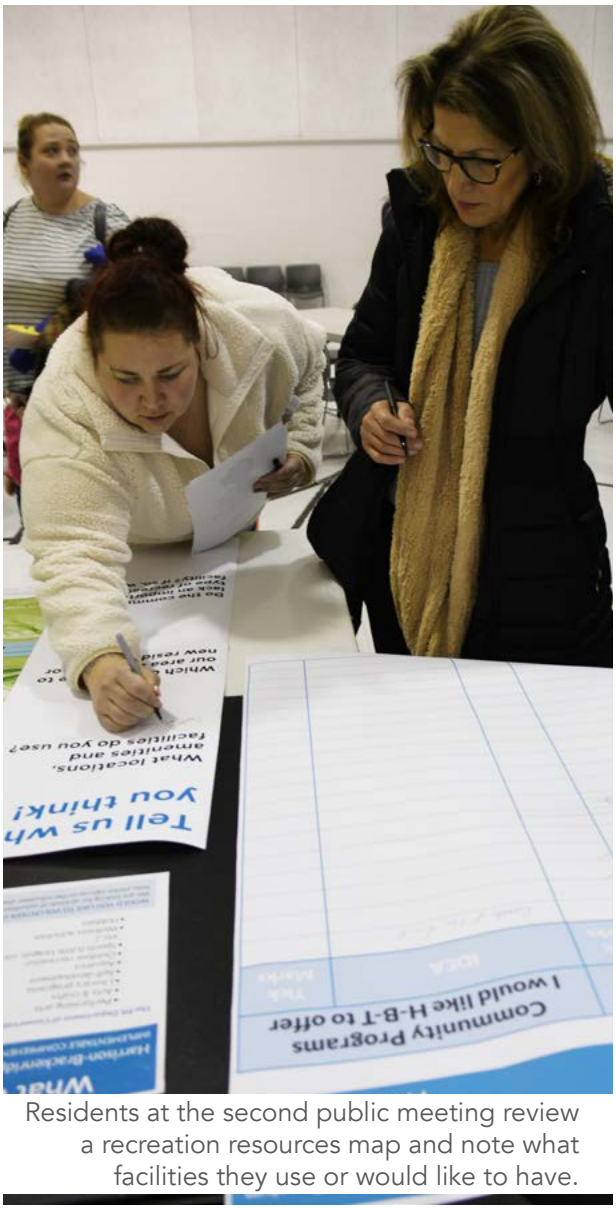
The steering committee met with Pennsylvania State Sen. Lindsay Williams on Sept. 12, 2019, to discuss this planning process and to seek her help in identifying opportunities for public funding.

Representatives from the three communities meet with Sen. Lindsay Williams, left, at Brackenridge Park.

PUBLIC MEETING 2

The second public meeting, Feb. 17, 2020, and held at the Salvation Army gym in Brackenridge, was a check-in with residents after the Key Issues were developed and some early ideas for solutions were sketched out. This meeting also served as an additional round of input, because the format asked residents to contribute ideas toward solutions to specific problems.

Sen. Lindsay Williams and Rep . Frank Dermody attended. Both povided supportive remarks about the comprehensive planning process and the plan's goals for community improvements.



Residents at the second public meeting review a recreation resources map and note what facilities they use or would like to have.

The Key Issues

One of the important concepts of an Implementable Comprehensive Plan is to: (1) focus the plan on real issues as identified by the community and , (2) match the number and types of issues to the capacity of the communities to implement the recommendations. Too often, earlier plans identified hundreds of recommendations that simply overwhelmed even the best-intentioned municipal staff. Through careful listening and much discussion with an active steering committee, we arrived at the following key issues.

The input from residents from all sources – public meetings, a community questionnaire, steering committee guidance and key stakeholder interviews – was collated and counted by topic. The consultant categorized all the "Problems To Solve," "Strengths to Build On," and used frequency and debree of vehemence to begin to identify themes and priorities.

The topics that emerged as priorities are called "Key Issues.

The Four Key Issues in Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum

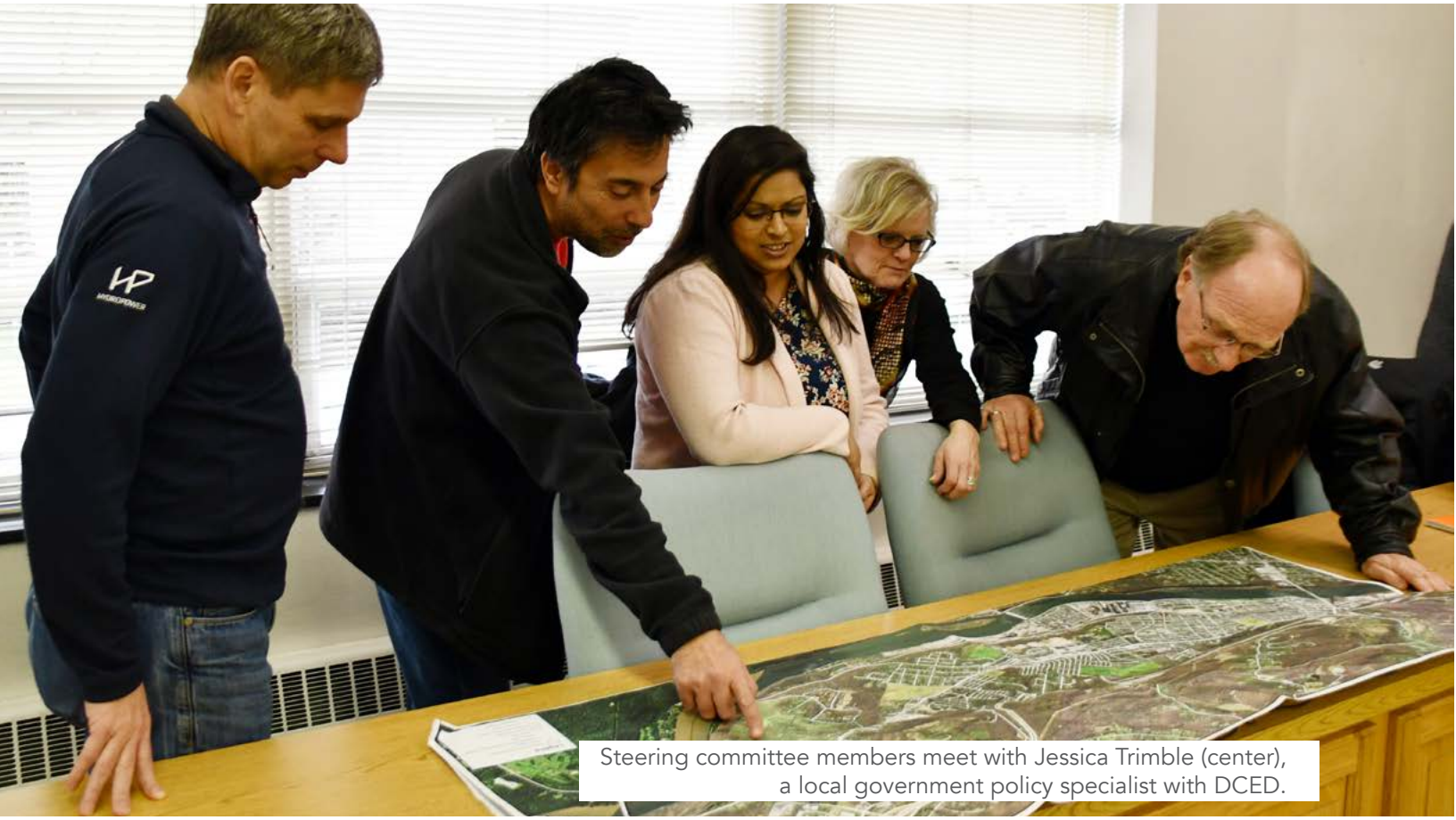
a. Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development
b. Property Deterioration and Blight
c. Trails, Parks and Recreation
d. Community Identity

History and context lie behind each Key Issue. These matters didn't emerge overnight as issues in the communities, and didn't become priorities suddenly. Rather, both problems and strengths have developed over time, often over decades. The implementable comprehensive plan report delves into the complexity of each Key Issue, assessing its components.

Identifying best practices for Key Issue solutions

The Steering Committee for this comprehensive plan process divided into small groups aligned with each Key Issue. Each group researched best practices and potential solutions to gain an overview of possible next steps. This would help the group determine what strategies might best apply in Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum, and align with community needs and capacity.

- The Social Enterprise, Comunity and Economic Development team met with Jessica Trimble, a Local Government Policy Specialist with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The group had an initial meeting via conference call and then hosted her for a field visit and in-person brainstorming meeting about what DCED programs might align with community goals.
- The Property Deterioration and Blight team met with two specialists affiliated with the Pennsylvania Housing Alliance: Andrea Mannino, Senior Advisor, Policy and Practice, and Winifred Branton, of Branton Strategies, which provides policy guidance in a legal context for communities working with the Housing Alliance. This team also met with Amanda Settelmaier, Executive Director of the Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments, who has developed a code enforcement database.
- The Trails, Parks and Recreation team met with Kathy Frankel, Recreation and Conservation Manager, Southwest Regional Office of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The conversation provided an overview of how DCNR strives to support local community improvements with technical and funding assistance.



Steering committee members meet with Jessica Trimble (center), a local government policy specialist with DCED.

- The Community Identity and Branding team met with Brenda Armstrong and Asaka Narumi from Visit Pittsburgh, to hear how that organization seeks to reflect the character of the Pittsburgh region in strategic communications. The team also met with representatives of New Sun Rising, a non-profit organization based in the Tri-Borough area along the Allegheny River, to learn how it supports sustainable economic and community development.

Along with ideas discussed with the state and regional professionals, the consultant developed a list of potential strategies the communities could undertake. The steering committee then chose the strategies it considered to be most important and most feasible, and ranked the strategies in order of those they felt most strongly that their communities should pursue.

The Key Issues and Strategies for Making Change

The implementable comprehensive plan report provides chapters for each Key Issue, presents history context and background, and lists the recommended strategies the communities should employ to address problems and build on strengths. The highest priority strategies include step-by-step guides for implementation. (A report summary is also available to provide a condensed version of the full implementable comprehensive plan report. It presents abridged versions of the descriptions and background of each Key Issue and provides a list of the strategies aimed at solving specific problems, but does not include step-by-step detail. The idea behind this is to provide two levels of detail for readers or users of the plan who have different levels of involvement.)

The Adoption Process and What's Next

Review and Adoption

Allegheny County Economic Development reviewed this comprehensive plan for consistency with Allegheny Places, the County's comprehensive plan, and Active Allegheny, the County's Active Transportation Plan.

In addition, the draft comprehensive plan report was provided to neighboring municipalities and Highlands School District for their review and consideration.

The comprehensive plan in a final draft form was presented at a joint public hearing on XX/XX/2020 prior to adoption by the three communitie's governing bodies. Adoption resolutions are provided in the Appendix or are available at these URLs:

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Why action is important

- There are costs to making changes (time, money, effort), but also potential costs to doing nothing (citizen resentment, declining property values, less tax revenue and overall decline).
- Citizens expressed a need for change in the four Key Issue areas, and are expecting follow-through.
- The communities can best ensure their future viability by diligently undertaking the improvements outlined in this implementable plan.

START-UP TO-DO LIST

Harrison	Brackenridge	Tarentum	Start-Up Task
✓	✓	✓	Create an implementation team for this plan.
✓	✓	✓	Survey local non-profit organizations to determine whether any has the interest in and capacity for serving as an Economic Development Corporation or Community Development Corporation.
✓	✓	✓	Harrison, Brackenridge, Tarentum governing boards each vote to support the EDC/CDC financially and institutionally, and determine how to leverage the agency's services.
✓	✓	✓	View the suggested locations for additional trees as depicted on the riverfront concept plans, and plant them.
	✓		Strive to end the difficult one-way traffic problem at the foot of Mile Lock Lane.
✓	✓		Discuss with ATI Corp. the possibility of the corporation's installing and maintaining a high-quality mural on the Brackenridge face of wall.
✓		✓	Improve the foot of Wood Street (Tarentum) and a pathway from Veteran's Way (Harrison) with seating and access to the riverfront for small-scale uses, such as fishing, bird-watching and rock skipping.
✓	✓	✓	Create and convene Meeting 1 of a blight team that will pursue funding, encourage code enforcement and DPW sharing, develop a legal definition of "blighted property," create an overaching strategy, and other steps.
✓	✓	✓	Hold Meeting 1 of a trails, parks and recreation group (including representatives from all three Recreation Boards and the comprehensive plan working group that has focused on Trails, Parks and Recreation, to start planning a joint event as a pilot project.
✓	✓	✓	The joint trails, parks and recreation group investigates state Department of Recreation and Natural Resources programs that encourage multi-municipal collaborations on recreation staffing, funding and technical assistance.
✓	✓	✓	The joint trails, parks and recreation group reviews the multi-municipal trails map and existing efforts to identify next steps for implementation.
✓	✓	✓	Create and distribute an illustrative map highlighting H-B-T assets and amenities, to underscore the communities' Identity and Branding.

JOBS, COMMERCE, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS GROWTH, LIFTING ALL BOATS

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum seek investment in people and places to encourage sustainable economic growth, good jobs and improved quality of life. This chapter describes the decades of disinvestment that created economic challenges, and current opportunities for improvement.

2 CHAPTER II SOCIAL ENTERPRISE, COMMUNITY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

KEY ISSUE: Social Enterprise, Community, and Economic Development

Issue Overview

Business development, job growth and social entrepreneurship together create a more stable local economy, which will make the communities a better place to live. Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum can pursue strategies listed in this chapter that capitalize on their assets such as some strong existing anchor businesses and industries, a local volunteer corps, interesting old buildings, traditional walkable business districts, the Allegheny River, and relatively affordable real estate.

Background and Context

As employment patterns changed and population declined in Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum since the 1970s, disinvestment created economic stress in the communities' commercial areas. Commercial property vacancies increased in all three communities.

Other external factors, such as the rise (and more recent decline) of The Pittsburgh Mills in Frazer Township and the global transition to online retail have created additional pressure on the business districts of the three municipalities.

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum thrive at individual and community scales thanks to social enterprise, community and economic development. The communities address disinvestment methodically, and align continuing efforts with objectives and goals developed collaboratively among the three communities and with existing businesses, institutions and non-profit organizations. The communities continuously respond to existing community needs and capitalize on strengths.

Today, most commercial buildings on the main downtown streets in Brackenridge are unoccupied. A few key tenants have helped Tarentum maintain a small downtown to some degree, but there are also numerous vacancies downtown, and in Tarentum's highway commercial zone along West Seventh Avenue. Tarentum has seen some new growth in its commercial corridor on East 10th Avenue. Harrison's commercial area, mainly in Natrona Heights along Freeport Road, has experienced challenges at the Heights Plaza shopping center, currently in receivership. The community has experienced commercial growth farther north at the Walmart Plaza.

The Heights Plaza's future is tied up in legal proceedings at this time, but improvements were made in the appearance of the northern half.

Elsewhere in Harrison Township, an ambitious development plan called Harrison Point is proposed for 168 acres along Route 28, to include senior independent living, medical office space, a technology park, restaurant space and a township park. In addition, pad-ready sites are awaiting development at Harrison Township Business Park on Alter Road.

Gatto is an anchor business in Tarentum.

All three communities are locations for industrial/manufacturing and light manufacturing, including a major presence of ATI, a highly automated steel rolling plant, in Harrison.

This discussion focuses mainly on the traditional commercial downtowns of Tarentum and Brackenridge, and the commercial areas along Freeport Road in Harrison and the River Road area of Natrona.

Investment has certainly occurred on a case-by-case basis, with additional possibilities in the works. Examples: Brackenridge Construction developed an attractive building at Cherry and Third; investors are planning renovations at two historic buildings in Harrison (Chestnut and Center, and Federal and North Canal); and two new businesses renovated old buildings in Tarentum (on Corbet Street), and plans are under way for Faith Community Partners to renovate buildings on Fifth Avenue and Corbet Street, and to create programming in Tarentum.

These improvements reflect both market-driven and social-enterprise ambitions. While "more business" is important for residents and the tax base, so is creating locations and opportunities for programs, initiatives, businesses and services that meet social and community needs. Equal access to services, food, health care and other necessities is important but as yet insufficient or absent in these communities.

"Character" buildings can attract redevelopment investors.

The strengths

- The Allegheny River provides a natural and realistic basis for developing attraction-based assets that foster small businesses and economic growth. Throughout the nation, communities have successfully embraced riverfronts as strengths that make them desireable to current and future residents as well as to visitors who come to enjoy views, activities, local businesses and river access. They foster economic development based on outdoor recreation, riverfront access, local businesses and connected walking and biking trails.
- Historic and "character" buildings: Many commercial and residential structures, particularly in "the Flats" portions of these communities were built in the early or mid-20th century. These can have great appeal to potential investors.
- Anchor businesses and employers: Companies and institutions such as Gatto, Blackburn Physicians Pharmacy, Wulfrath Refactories, Weleski Transfer, Brackenridge Construction, ATI, Natrona Bottling Company, Allegheny Valley Hospital and UPMC-Natrona Heights, Highlands School District, No. 1 Cochran, JV Manufacturing, Trib Total Media, Nick Chevrolet, Highland Tire, and others provide centers of gravity for future business growth.
- Affordable prices: Because of population decline and other factors, properties can be acquired for less money than in high-demand areas.

The problems

- Undeveloped vision and goals: The communities or businesses districts have not created a statement articulating their social enterprise, economic and community development vision and goals. As well, the communities need to revise their community development objectives.
- Vacancies and disinvestment: Vacant buildings and lots create a need for infill development. Efforts to identify infill locations are tied to the issue of property deterioration and blight.
- Lack of compiled data: The communities do not have an inventory of available properties and information on "what it would take" for them to be rehabbed or made market-ready.
- Insufficient basis for marketing: The communities or business districts have not developed a strategic, coordinated or concerted message for marketing that makes prospective investors, businesses, residents and tenants decide to take a look.
- Some problems are not in official municipal control: The Heights Plaza is privately not publicly owned, and as such its redevelopment is largely outside of township hands.
- Lack of human and financial resources: There is a need for a person or group to lead social enterprise, economic and community development work, such as creating an inventory, working with existing businesses to address their needs, developing programs and initiatives, seeking funding, and conducting marketing.
- Ordinances may not align with contemporary goals: The communities have different zoning schemes dating to different decades. Revisions may be needed to support revised community development objectives, and an articulated vision. Brackenridge's zoning map and ordinances are not available online, and the community does not have a planning commission, though it has the Brackenridge Improvement Group.
- Lack of access: Some residents have insufficient or non-existent access to grocery stores, health care, education, employment and other necessary services.
- Non-contiguous area: The business districts in "the Flats" are not connected to each other, and the commercial areas along Freeport Road are further separated by geography and travel patterns.

Commercial plaza on Freeport Road, Harrison, is separated geographically from the traditional downtowns.

Brackenridge Avenue, Brackenridge, the community's commercial corridor, has experienced disinvestment.

Looking Ahead

Social enterprise, community and economic development goals can best be met through a coordinated effort among the communities, in collaboration with existing businesses and non-profit organizations. Efforts to create new development opportunities of all types should:

- Align with community development objectives, goals, strategies, master plans and/or programmatic initiatives that are created and held in common among the three communities.
- Be developed jointly among the three communities, sharing efforts and services to the greatest degree feasible, and potentially including a joint community/economic development organization to provide leadership.
- Support the intention of creating and maintaining visually attractive communities.
- Whenever possible, support local entrepreneurship and small business.
- Whenever possible, involve, include and support the goals of existing businesses and established community institutions and non-profits, including the Highlands Partnership Network, which strives to foster communication among community groups, and Faith Community Partners (FCP), which is in the process of rehabilitating some structures in Tarentum, developing a Neighborhood Partnership Program and creating a Community Development Corporation.
- Recognize that redevelopment of deteriorated residential properties can forestall disinvestment in the community by interrupting a vicious cycle.
- Align with a related multi-municipal plan to address commercial and residential property deterioration and blight.
- Update the communities' zoning districts and ordinances.
- Respond to the needs of residents who do not have transportation access to food, goods and services.
- Capitalize on existing assets of the communities, such as the Allegheny Riverfront, municipal parks, and a sidewalk network and other active transportation infrastructure.
- Recognize and strive to resolve the friction that can occur between communities if one is "holding out" for the kind of development it believes enhances community character but another is seeking development of any sort as quickly as possible to generate revenue.

STRATEGIES: Improving Social Enterprise, Community and Economic Development

High-priority strategies

1 **Support a formation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or Economic Development Corporation (EDC) that represents all three municipalities, then methodically leverage the agency's services.**

Such an organization would, it is hoped, support the entirety of this comprehensive plan and become a key driver of plan implementation. Conversely, the implementation steps of the plan are intended to help foster social, community and economic development goals, which are the point of a CDC/EDC. For example, a the agency would strive to enhance the quality of life, the economic viability, and the overall vitality of the communities through actions such as remediating blight; restoring and repurposing vacant and underutilized commercial and residential buildings; and building a coalition of community organizations, governmental agencies, businesses, and faith-based organizations that implement joint planning efforts, such as this comprehensive plan.

An EDC/CDC will be a clearinghouse for available commercial property, grant writing and administration, and serve as a liaison between federal, state, county and local governments and agencies to foster development. An EDC/CDC will also be a promoting body for the three communities.

The agency's ultimate goals will be to foster job growth, expand local options for goods and services, make the communities a better place to live, and through those and other steps, enhance the local tax base.

More about Economic or Community Development Corporations

An Economic Development Corp. (EDC) or Community Development Corp. (CDC) is a non-profit organization created to work collaboratively with local governments and other institutions and agencies. Typically, an EDC strives to improve local economic conditions by fostering business and job growth, while a CDC strives to improve quality of life conditions more generally, making the community a better place to live.

Since the lines between those goals can overlap, this plan does not advise whether the communities should create one versus the other. An EDC is expected by the IRS to conduct its work in economically depressed or blighted areas and strive to improve economic conditions.

EDCs and CDCs are typically 501(c)3 or 501(c)4 organizations under the U.S. tax code, the main difference being that 501(c)3s are charitable organizations and 501(c)4s are social welfare organizations structured to be able to do more advocacy and lobbying. A 501(c)3 or 501(c)4 organization already operating in the communities could take on the responsibilities of an EDC or CDC, so long as the organization is properly incorporated under federal and state law. An existing organization should obtain legal advice to ensure it can add the EDC or CDC functions within the breadth of its mission statement, governance structure, programmatic choices and its financial practices.

Because it is far more expedient for an existing non-profit organization to add EDC/CDC responsibilities than for community stakeholders to start a non-profit from scratch for this purpose, the following set of next steps begins with that suggestion.

The EDC or CDC would define its mission and create programs or projects in support of that mission. Two examples, Greensburg Community Development Corp. and Economic Development South, are explained on this page and the next two pages.

Greensburg Community Development Corp. (GCDC)

GREENSBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

MISSION STATEMENT: The purpose of the Greensburg Community Development Corporation (GCDC) is to assist the City of Greensburg, businesses, institutions, and organizations in the development and implementation of plans and programs encompassing total community development, beginning in the core area and focused within the geographical boundaries of the City.

DCDC has three focus areas: Cultural and Shopping District offerings; increasing private and public investment within the downtown area; strengthening Greensburg's neighborhoods.

Programs and projects include:

- Façade improvements
- ThinkGreensburg (expand cultural and shopping district; increase private and public investment in downtown; strengthen neighborhoods)
- Promote Greensburg Development, including a healthcare district
- LERTA/G funds – Use Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA) funds as a way to implement strategic financial opportunities.

At a Glance

- GCDC is a 501(c)3.
- In 2017 it had revenue of about $109,000 and expenses of about $91,000. Funding sources included gifts, grants, contributions and membership fees. It was starting to collect rental income from property it owned. Expenses were for programs (façade program, Lynch Field Project, Street light banners, supplies), subscriptions, supplies, advertising, bank fees, travel/meetings, meals.
- It has a paid executive director (about 15 hours/week and paid within a range of $11,000 to $30,000).
- It has a 35-member board of directors.

Economic Development South (EDC)

MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of Economic Development South is to strengthen our business and residential communities by building innovative partnerships.

Economic Development South is a multi-municipal, corridor-based community development corporation that encompasses a significant portion of the South Pittsburgh/ South Hills region of Allegheny County. Our coalition of communities have come together to positively impact our shared commercial corridors – Route 51 (Saw Mill Run Blvd.) and Brownsville Road, most notably. This approach is the thread that binds our communities together – based on a shared interest and benefit in the redevelopment and revitalization of these commercial and transportation corridors.

EDS adheres to a comprehensive approach to economic development: wherein issues of real estate development, community marketing, small business services, green infrastructure, transportation and transit accessibility, and beautification are advanced concurrently instead of opportunistically. Our wide-reaching approach to encouraging revitalization and reinvestment centers in these specific five core areas of impact:

- Transportation
- Environment
- Marketing
- Real Estate
- Business

At a Glance

- EDC is a 501(c)3.
- It serves 13 communities in Pittsburgh's South Hills area.
- Its staff members have focus areas including community food initiatives, health and social services, produce marketplace and environmental initiatives.
- In 2018 it had revenue of about $1.6 million from gifts, grants, contributions and membership fees. It had expenses of about $1.54 million including about $340,000 on programs and $1.3 million on salaries, general operations and management.
- Its executive director was paid $100,000, and it has 5 other staff members.
- It has a 28-member volunteer board of directors, most representing dedicated seats from member communities and community organizations.

Funders and Partners

- Allegheny Conference of Community Development
- Allegheny Conservation District
- Allegheny County Economic Development
- Allegheny Watershed Alliance
- Baldwin Borough
- Baldwin-Whitehall School District

- Bethel Park
- Birmingham Foundation
- BNY Mellon
- Brashear Association
- Brentwood Bank
- Brentwood Borough
- Brentwood School District
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Carrick Community Council
- Castle Shannon Borough
- Chesepeake Commons
- City of Clairton
- City of Clairton School District
- City of Pittsburgh
- City of Pittsburgh School District
- Department of Community and Economic Development
- Department of Natural Conservation of Resources
- Dollar Bank
- EcoBlu
- Fifth Third Bank
- First National Bank
- Foundation for PA Watersheds
- Grounded (formerly GTECH Strategies)
- Highmark
- Highmark Foundation
- Hillman Foundation
- Hilltop Economic Development Corporation
- Huntington Bank
- Jefferson Hills Borough
- Jefferson Regional Foundation
- Just Harvest
- Knoxville Community Council
- Mon Valley Initiative
- Morningstar Community Services, Inc.
- Mt. Oliver Borough
- Neighborhood Allies
- Neighborworks SWPA
- Overbrook Community Council
- PA American Water
- Penn State Center
- PennDOT
- Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group
- Pittsburgh Foundation
- Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
- Pleasant Hills Borough
- PWSA
- Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh
- RK Mellon Foundation
- South Pittsburgh Development Corporation
- The Design Center of Pittsburgh
- The Forbes Fund
- The Heinz Endowments
- Tree Pittsburgh
- University of Pittsburgh
- University of Pittsburgh – SBDC
- Urban Redevelopment Authority
- UrbanKind Institute
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Viable Industries
- West Jefferson School District
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- Whitehall Borough

Making It Happen

Survey local non-profit organizations to determine whether any has the interest in and capacity for serving as an Economic Development Corporation or Community Development Corporation.

An appropriate choice would be a non-profit organization that has office space, a track record at fund-raising, strong governance, employee and volunteer capacity, respect of the community, and the desire to include EDC/CDC functions to its existing mission.

Only if no suitable non-profit organization can be recruited or identified, should the three communities seek community stakeholders to create a body to serve this important function.

NOTE: As this plan was being completed, Faith Community Partners (FCP Services Inc.) expanded its service in the Upper Allegheny Valley to serve as a Community Development Corporation (CDC) with a particular emphasis on Harrison Township and the Boroughs of Brackenridge and Tarentum. See Appendix 2A.

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum support the EDC/CDC financially and institutionally.

Once an appropriate non-profit partner is identified, the three communities should anticipate providing financial and institutional support, as this will be crucial to efforts to propel its mission.

An EDC/CDC is likely to require funding from the municipalities as well as from grants, corporate donations and trusts, with a goal of becoming self-sustaining or at least far less reliant on governmental support over time. (See the list of nearly 70 funders and partners listed on pages 14-15 in the example for Economic Development South for ideas of potential sources.)

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum should participate in the governance of the EDC/CDC by supplying board members and to ensure that the agency's actions align with the goals and strategies of this Comprehensive Plan. To align with the Key Issues of this comprehensive plan, the focus areas should take a multi-municipal approach to these:

- Address blight
- Improve real estate and business development prospects, including emphasizing the Allegheny Riverfront as an asset
- Encourage the development of trails and other active transportation connectivity
- Develop and champion the communities' local identity and brand

NOTE: A guide to Community and Local Government Assistance programs offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development is provided in Appendix 2B.

2 Maximize the Allegheny Riverfront as a prime community asset, as demonstrated in the concept drawings that incorporate walking and biking routes, parks, river access or views, historic neighborhoods, and connections with the traditional downtowns.

The Allegheny River should be a crucial driver of the communities' identity and place-making, and through that, the communities' economic development.

Unlike many other river-contiguous communities in Allegheny County, Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum each have riverfront public spaces or access points that can serve as catalysts for economic development and community improvements.

Capitalizing on the availability of the riverfront in all three communities will be a decades-long process rather than a rapid transformation. Maximizing the riverfront is huge undertaking that would include many facets of community life and physical assets: recreation, natural resources, commerce in the traditional downtowns, placemaking, cultural and historic resources, blight remediation and more. As a whole it is a major undertaking. But broken into pieces, it is possible to get the ball rolling on specific projects that build community identity, create placemaking and make the most of local assets. River-oriented development is a proven, long-term strategy for creating employment opportunities and an increased tax base that benefit all residents.

Communities nationwide have embraced riverfronts as strengths that make them desireable to current and future residents as well as to visitors who come to enjoy views, activities, local businesses and river access. This is not to imply that a kayak launch or river overlook is more important to local residents than direct services like road paving or public safety, but rather that economic development based on outdoor recreation, riverfront access and connected walking and biking trails is a proven successful model for economic development.

This strategy will be particularly effective if Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum work not only with each other and also think regionally – with other Allegheny River towns to the north and south, the communities can captialize on the river as an economic and community asset.

Part of the linear public riverfront area in the Natrona section of Harrison Township

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) project OutdoorTowns.org (formerly separate programs called River Towns and Trail Towns) lists these characteristics of thriving "outdoor towns:"

- Outdoor Towns are fun and welcoming. They invite all people to come play outside.
- Outdoor Towns have easy access to recreation. Visitors come for hiking, biking, paddling, hunting, fishing, or wildlife viewing.
- Outdoor Towns embrace nearby parks, trails, rivers, lakes, and forests as valuable assets to be protected and enhanced.
- Outdoor Towns are vibrant communities that connect places to eat, stay, and shop with people seeking adventure.

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum are in a position to make gains in each of these aspects or elements as a means of driving economic and community development overall. On the following pages are concept drawings that reflect some proposed improvements that could propel this approach. Following the maps are specfic implementation next steps.

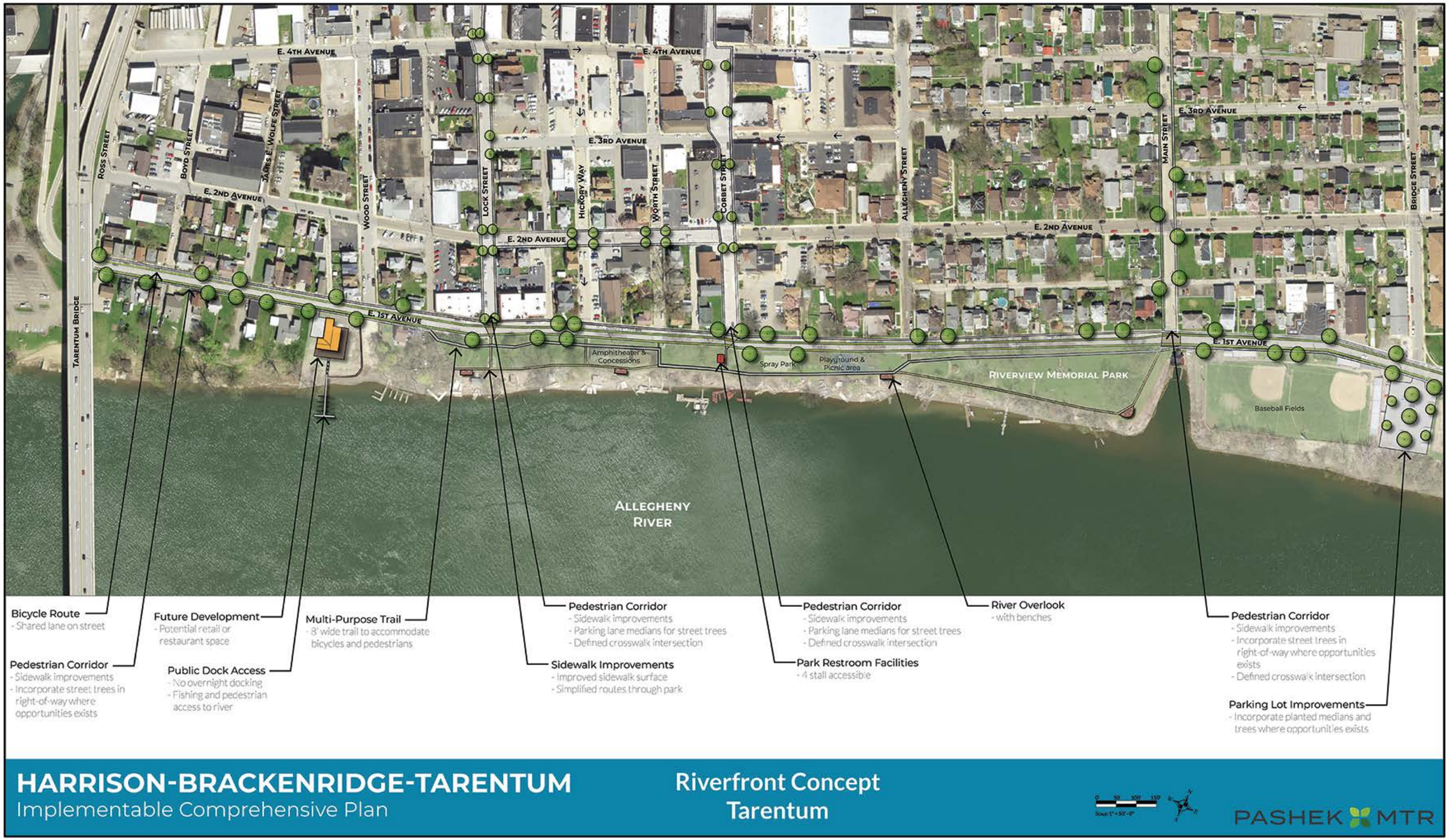
NOTE: The American Planning Association's "Downtown Revitalization in Small and Midsized Cities" provides additional best practices. The document's executive summary is provided in Appendix 2C.

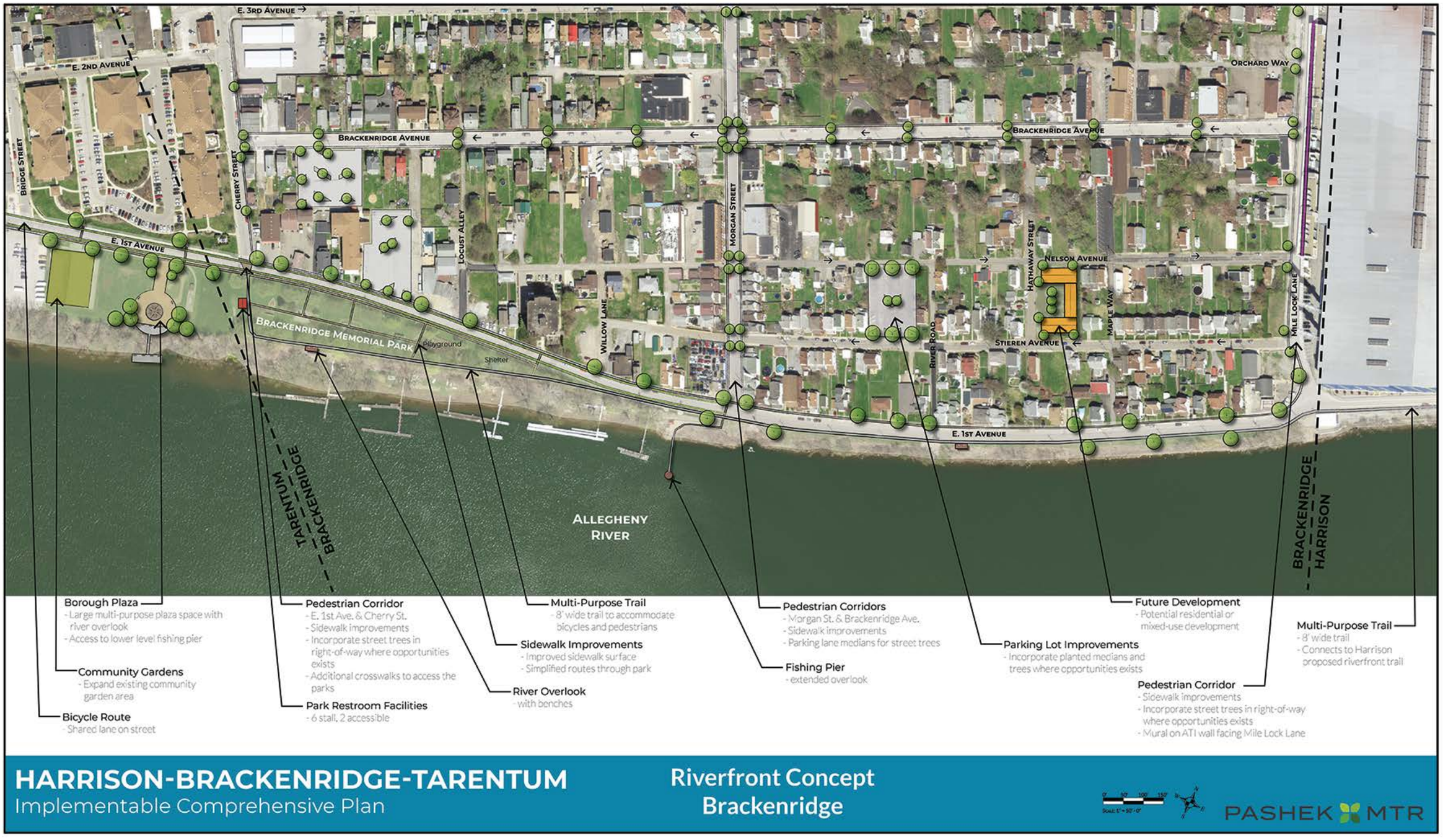
✓ Making It Happen

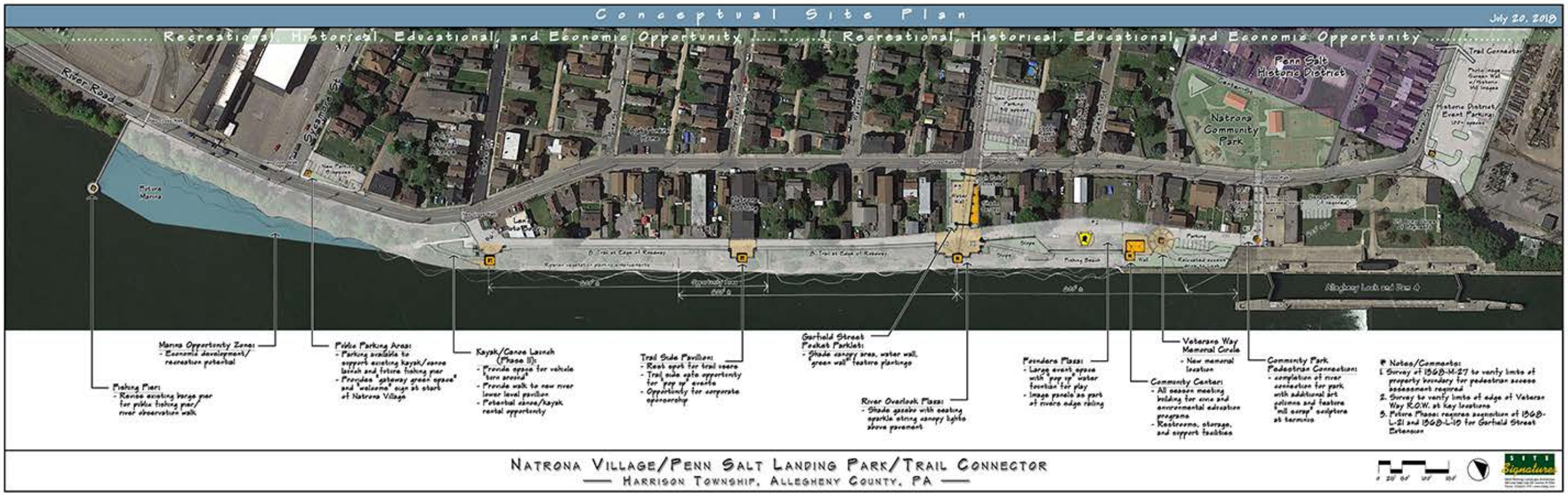
As noted, this is a major undertaking that should be broken into smaller steps to be implementable. Here are some ideas for places to start:

❑ **Note on the drawings the suggested locations for additional trees, and plant them. (All three communities)**

Some newer and some mature trees in Tarentum's Riverview Memorial Park


E. 4th Avenue
E. 4th Avenue
E. 3rd Avenue
E. 3rd Avenue
E. 2nd Avenue
E. 2nd Avenue
E. 2nd Avenue
E. 1st Avenue
E. 1st Avenue
Ross Street
Boyd Street
James E. Wolfe Street
Wood Street
Lock Street
Hickory Way
Worth Street
Corbet Street
Allegheny Street
Main Street
Bridge Street
Tarentum Bridge
Amphitheater & Concessions
Spray Park
Playground & Picnic area
Riverview Memorial Park
Baseball Fields
Allegheny River
Bicycle Route
- Shared lane on street
Pedestrian Corridor
- Sidewalk improvements
- Incorporate street trees in right-of-way where opportunities exists
Future Development
- Potential retail or restaurant space
Public Dock Access
- No overnight docking
- Fishing and pedestrian access to river
Multi-Purpose Trail
- 8' wide trail to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians
Pedestrian Corridor
- Sidewalk improvements
- Parking lane medians for street trees
- Defined crosswalk intersection
Sidewalk Improvements
- Improved sidewalk surface
- Simplified routes through park
Pedestrian Corridor
- Sidewalk improvements
- Parking lane medians for street trees
- Defined crosswalk intersection
Park Restroom Facilities
- 4 stall accessible
River Overlook
- with benches
Pedestrian Corridor
- Sidewalk improvements
- Incorporate street trees in right-of-way where opportunities exists
- Defined crosswalk intersection
Parking Lot Improvements
- Incorporate planted medians and trees where opportunities exists
HARRISON-BRACKENRIDGE-TARENTUM
Implementable Comprehensive Plan
Riverfront Concept
Tarentum
PASHEK MTR


E. 3rd Avenue
E. 2nd Avenue
Bridge Street
Cherry Street
Brackenridge Avenue
Locust Alley
Willow Lane
Morgan Street
Hathaway Street
Nelson Avenue
Orchard Way
E. 1st Avenue
Brackenridge Memorial Park
Playground
Shelter
River Road
Maple Way
Stieren Avenue
Mile Lock Lane
Allegheny River
Tarentum
Brackenridge
Harrison
Borough Plaza
- Large multi-purpose plaza space with river overlook
- Access to lower level fishing pier
Community Gardens
- Expand existing community garden area
Bicycle Route
- Shared lane on street
Pedestrian Corridor
- E. 1st Ave. & Cherry St.
- Sidewalk improvements
- Incorporate street trees in right-of-way where opportunities exists
- Additional crosswalks to access the parks
Park Restroom Facilities
- 6 stall, 2 accessible
River Overlook
- with benches
Sidewalk Improvements
- Improved sidewalk surface
- Simplified routes through park
Multi-Purpose Trail
- 8' wide trail to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians
Fishing Pier
- extended overlook
Pedestrian Corridors
- Morgan St. & Brackenridge Ave.
- Sidewalk improvements
- Parking lane medians for street trees
Parking Lot Improvements
- Incorporate planted medians and trees where opportunities exists
Future Development
- Potential residential or mixed-use development
Pedestrian Corridor
- Sidewalk improvements
- Incorporate street trees in right-of-way where opportunities exists
- Mural on ATI wall facing Mile Lock Lane
Multi-Purpose Trail
- 8' wide trail
- Connects to Harrison proposed riverfront trail
HARRISON-BRACKENRIDGE-TARENTUM
Implementable Comprehensive Plan
Riverfront Concept
Brackenridge
PASHEK MTR



Conceptual Design for Natrona Village courtesy of Site Signatures

- [ ] **Strive to end the difficult one-way traffic problem at the foot of Mile Lock Lane. (Brackenridge)**

A strategy could be to determine:

a. If the owner of vacant parcels 1224-H-314 and 316 would sell them at low cost to the Borough

b. If the owner of 1224-H-320 would then be willing to execute a land trade

c. If Allegheny County would be willing to alter the road alignment.

- [ ] **Discuss with ATI Corp. the possibility of the corporation's installing and maintaining a high-quality mural on the Brackenridge face of its wall. (Brackenridge and Harrison)**

A view of the ATI retaining wall along Mile Lock Lane

- [ ] **Improve the foot of Wood Street into a parklet with seating and access to the riverfront for small-scale uses such as a kayak launch. (Tarentum)**

Should it be possible, the adjacent vacant parcel, zoned R-1 and within the Riverfront Overlay District, should be acquired for local public use, parkland.

View to the Allegheny River from East First Avenue down the Wood Street right of way.

- [ ] **Improve the river access point at Veterans Way Linear Park – currently an informal trail down the bank – for small-scale uses such as fishing and stone-skipping. (Harrison)**

A rocky path extends from Veterans Way to the river, not far below the dam

- [ ] **Consider creating or amending Riverfront Overlay Zoning Districts to enable some forms of commercial development in streets near the river to encourage economic development and entrepreneurship and to create more of a destination environment for local residents and visitors to the community.**

- [ ] **Consider creating facade improvement programs for commercial properties on riverfront access streets to create more inviting environments.**

- ❑ **Continue to implement the trail plans to develop segments of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail and local connecting routes, as shown on the concept maps as well as the trail maps in Chapter 3, and as under discussion with Allegheny County, other agencies and non-profits.**

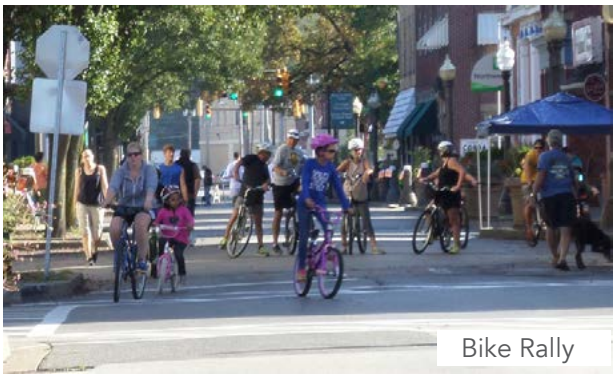
A proposed bike route along Freeport Road in Harrison would create access to Harrison Hills Park

A proposed bike route in Brakenridge would pass near the community's historic War Memorial

A proposed bike route in Tarentum would include a segment along the borough's Riverview Memorial Park

Additional strategies

3 **Give people reasons to visit targeted areas in the three communities, such as the traditional downtowns, and provide amenities.**


Bike Rally

Parades

Night Market

"Crawl"

Open Streets fitness event

Open Streets concert

This can include providing inviting amenities, such as streetscaping benches, street trees, façade improvements, plants or banners.

This also can include organizing street festivals, themed events or other activities. "Activating the space" creates enthusiasm on the part of residents and business owners, builds community pride, and potentially draws outsiders to visit. These efforts can help to jump-start revitalization.

Activities can be mounted by local groups such as the Brackenridge Improvement Group, merchants/

businesses, an independent group or non-profit, or the communities' Reccreation Boards, working collaboratively. Here are suggested types of activities or events; maybe the communities could work collectively to undertake one of each type per year:

- Street festivals with art, music, food. These can be themed, such as one highlighting the achievement of local youth, showing off their music/bands, art works, skills or volunteer initiatives. Another themed street festival could celebrate active lifestyles and health, with yoga and fitness activities and "open streets" for walking and cycling.
- "Crawls," also known as walking tours or self-guided tours. Suggestions include themed crawls such as to show off local businesses, gardens, houses of worship, or high-priority targets for property rehabilitation. One additional idea for a theme would be a walking tour explaining concept plans for riverfront development (see concept drawings).
- A "night market" where local farms or artisans can sell their products/wares.

4 Create and maintain a consolidated listing of commercial spaces available for the three communities, with information about "what it would take" to get the property ready for occupancy or redevelopment.

This list would have to be actively curated in order to keep current; although this task would rightly fall to a CDC or EDC in the future, its first draft can be undertaken at this time. This can be done using college or graduate-level interns from programs such as GIS/Geography, Planning, Public Affairs or Urban Design.

1. Recruit a Planning Commission member to supervise the interns' work, and identify the interns or recruit a college faculty member to make this a class project. Map vacancies and opportunities in the communities, with accompanying data-sets such as photos and rehabilitation needs.
2. This project can be initially achieved without funding if academic credit for students can be arranged.
3. Recruit a local commercial real estate agent to provide guidance and expertise.
4. Use open-source mapping and information-sharing applications so the communities and later an EDC/CDC can maintain the maps and lists with current information.

5 Identify and champion large sites that could have redevelopment potential.

The communities could enhance their tax rolls if vacant or underused properties can be redeveloped. The CDC/EDC or Planning Commissions can take the lead on these tasks.

a. List or map vacant former industrial or manufacturing sites, lay-down yards, unoccupied prepared sites, golf course or other large sites.

b. Open discussions with the property owners to learn about their plans for the properties and current conditions at the sites, such as whether environmental testing has occurred, and any obstacles to redevelopment.

c. Initiate conversations with Allegheny County Economic Development, the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County, or development companies operating in the regional market to see if there is potential to pursue mutual goals.

6 Arrange for the EDC/CDC or the individual municipalities to provide web-hosting of the high-priority target properties for redevelopment as set out in Strategies No. 2 and 5.

a. Produce downloadable FAQ sheets, such as explaining steps toward redeveloping a specific property and resources available; and explainers for issues that routinely pop up, such as "What's going on at the Heights Plaza?" or "Why don't you 'bring in a Chick-Fil-A?' "

b. Align all Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development implementation efforts with initiatives in the "Community Identity" chapter, so that Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum are increasingly able to "speak with one voice" to residents, business owners and potential residents or investors about the communities and their strengths and opportunities.

7 Align redevelopment and blight-fighting efforts, working from jointly developed priorities, goals and strategies. Leverage the services of the CDC/EDC. Begin with these general areas in the community as revitalization targets:

a. The riverfront areas in all three communities, as noted above.
b. Tarentum's traditional downtown; 7th Avenue in West Tarentum
c. Harrison's traditional downtown in Natrona, including Center Street and Chestnut Street, and Freeport Road between Heights Plaza and Walmart
d. Brackenridge's traditional downtown, including Brackenridge Avenue

Here are some potential ways of proceeding with this:

- Adopt the social entrepreneurship model Faith Community Partners (FCP) is applying in Tarentum, which is to first identify community needs, then redevelop buildings in the community to provide a means of addressing those needs. For example, FCP's first effort has been to rehab a building to house a laundromat and shared working space/community area/library, which were needs identified by community members. FCP, as a non-profit owner and manager, seeks to break even on its endeavors or reinvest in the next project operating for the community's benefit.
- Adopt the business entrepreneurship model, which helps match businesses with locations or vice versa. For example, from a list of available commercial spaces (see No. 2 above) or a list of businesses seeking a location to accommodate a new business or expanded operations of an existing business.
- Identify multiple residential properties for demolition, and seek a developer to build new housing that aligns with other goals of this plan as one step for remediating blight and stabilizing the housing base in crucial areas.

The group responsible for this would be a new EDC/CDC. In the absence of such an organization, the planning commissions would need to take a more active role, working with individual property owners or entrepreneurs to simultaneously address blight and seek reinvestment.

8 Explore creating tax increment financing districts (TIFs) in specific areas of the communities to help finance redevelopment.

Begin with a workshop session held with Allegheny County staff members with this expertise, to begin identifying possibilities and specific next steps. Contact: Samuel Ezio Bozzolla, Allegheny County Department of Economic Development, Authorities Division, 412-350-1194 or Sam.Bozzolla@AlleghenyCounty.US

9 Working through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, create a Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) or Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) in Brackenridge and Harrison (perhaps the Natrona neighborhood). In Tarentum, FCP has initiated a Neighborhood Partnership Program.

Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP)

- A project must serve distressed areas or support neighborhood conservation. Projects must fall under one of the following categories: affordable housing programs, community services, crime prevention, education, job training or neighborhood assistance. A tax credit of up to 55% can be awarded.

Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP)

- Long-term collaborations (five years or more) of business, government and community leaders to produce a comprehensive, asset-based and relationship-driven approach to community development. A tax credit of 75% or 80% can be awarded based on the length of the program.

Contact: Johnna A. Pro, Regional Director/Southwest, PA Department of Community & Economic Development, 412-565-5098 or jopro@pa.gov

10 The communities should support efforts by a CDC/EDC to conduct a market study to determine strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the communities.

This is most likely a stretch goal, but should not be dismissed without consideration since it could have subtantial future value if the communities later wish to make realistic pitches for funding and investments to the private, public and non-profit sectors. A study can also clarify how not to spend time and money for low-likelihood prospective projects. The cost of hiring a consultant with this expertise could be approximately $25,000.

11 Review ordinances and consider changing some zoning provisions to encourage a range of development types.

Many traditional zoning district definitions, use charts and ordinances do not allow some uses that are considered important options today. This can include provisions related to urban farming, mixed-use development, and accessory uses, among others. Other ordinances may need updating to encourage desired types of development, such as those that encourage incorporating sustainability measures such as green infrastructure or net-zero buildings.

The Planning Commissions are best positioned to conduct reviews of existing ordinances and make recommendations.

12 Engage in planning for the future of the Heights Plaza.

The condition of the Heights Plaza has been a topic of discussion for years. At the time of this writing, the property is in receivership, and the expectation is that the property will continue to be privately held.

Property owners decide what to demolish or build on their property, with how much financial investment and risk, and when to do it – within the limits of regulations, laws, codes and permits. However, the township has the ability to create ordinances that guide future development, and can enforce codes and ordinances governing safety and health if the properties are not sufficiently maintained.

Because Harrison Township has the ability to influence future development and regulate uses and appearance, here are some approaches:

1. Harrison Township elected officials, as representatives of the community, should develop a Vision Plan to articulate what is the desired future for this property. A Vision Plan, particularly if it leverages the expertise of a CDC/EDC, can be the foundation for any future changes in ordinances or policies, including those that consider flexibility with zoning for the redevelopment that can be undertaken at the property.
2. As future development will also depend on market forces and owner actions, this plan recommends regular communication with the receiver or owner.
3. Another tool would be for Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum to adopt a "specific plan" of development for non-residential sites within the multi-municipal planning area, per Section 1106 of Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code. The municipalities' specific plan would govern development of non-residential sites.

Renovated facades in the northern area of the Heights Plaza

13 Strengthen the local food system.

Consistent local access to fresh, nutritious food helps keep people healthy. It can also help keep communities healthy, empowering growers and producers to contribute to the local economy and connecting neighbors. The communities should seek ways to bring food growing, processing and preparing closer to home, increasing resilience in an era of increasing climate and energy uncertainty and providing options for improved health outcomes.

Strategies include:

- Continue to support and facilitate regular farmers' market events. Seek ways to increase access to and publicity for the events.
- Ensure that zoning provides ways to create family, community and/or school gardens.
- Identify and acquire clean vacant property suitable for community gardens, connect would-be gardeners without land access to local organizations that can help them establish access, a structure for the space and a maintenance plan.
- Coordinate the sharing and swapping of garden supplies. A community compost pile represents a new life for food scraps and yard trimmings as well as a nutrient-rich resource for gardeners. Communities could consider establishing a garden tool lending library for items such as lawn mowers, pruners, shovels and post-hole diggers.
- Analyze barriers to entry in the local market for small-scale food producers and sellers. What would need to happen for a corner grocery to be viable, or to make space available and affordable to a restaurant entrepreneur?

14 Connect all residents to affordable, reliable high-speed internet access.

The Covid-19 pandemic threw into sharp relief the importance of solid residential internet access for education, for business and employment, for health care, for public safety and for staying connected to the world. Households without affordable broadband access are comparatively isolated and left behind by an increasingly online world. Pockets of scarcity exist throughout all three communities, according to federal and provider maps, resulting from a lack of providers in some areas and a lack of affordable service options in others. According to one estimate, more than 60% of residents in Allegheny County's economically deprived communities lack affordable residential internet access.

The economic sustainability of Harrison Township, Brackenridge and Tarentum depends just as much on the infrastructure of broadband as it does on the infrastructure of Route 28. The communities need strong, reliable access to attract and retain businesses as well as younger, more affluent residents. Luckily, technology innovations such as last-mile wireless distribution exist to overcome obstacles such as the cost of installing cable and wire. However, the communities will need to advocate for themselves to ensure that they are competitive for the resources available to improve broadband access.

The communities should support efforts by a CDC/EDC to plan for, advocate for and secure resources for improving broadband infrastructure.

ADDRESSING THE IMPACTS OF DETERIORATING BUILDINGS

The presence of deteriorating properties can have negative effects on community pride, social stability and the economic prospects of a place. This chapter describes how poor property conditionor blight and its consequences spread, and how the challenges and solutions are shared by all three communities. It also notes the value of interesting "character" buildings that may be suitable for rehabilitation for commercial, residential or mixed uses.

3 CHAPTER III BLIGHT & PROPERTY DETERIORATION

KEY ISSUE: Blight & Property Deterioration

Issue Overview

Property deterioration is a problem that crops up in nearly every community in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area, or indeed the nation. It negatively affects quality of life, community reputation, and economic growth. Addressing the problem is not easy, but it is possible, via the proven strategies presented in this chapter. Because of economies of scale and because blight doesn't recognize municipal boundaries, the problem is best addressed on a multi-municipal basis.

Background and Context

The story of blight in our communities has similar origins throughout Western PA. In some cases, a lack of jobs may lead people to move out, which leaves homes and businesses vacant. Also, as the population ages, deaths can leave homes unoccupied. People who inherit properties may not want them, and owners sometimes turn the houses into rentals or just walk away. Some owners do not have the intention to care for property, but others may not have the means or capacity to do so. Some first-time home owners may not know how.

Deteriorating property can be cancerous when it recurs and radiates from clusters. Our communities must contain it so that it does not start to harm property values next door, or on the next street, or the next block. An impression by residents or outsiders that blight is eroding a community can have a snowballing effect on the community's prospects. We must work to turn the tide, although that is difficult, as we have all seen over a few decades of effort.

All three municipalities recognize the importance of this issue, which they hold in common. The communities have had some success in addressing property deterioration

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum present a low incidence of deteriorated or blighted properties. They follow a jointly developed plan to remediate, demolish and/or redevelop properties in support of quality of life, public health and economic/ community development goals.

or blight on a case-by-case basis through code enforcement, legal action, property acquisition, remediation, demolition and/or redevelopment.

Each community has its own level of resources to apply to the problem – though never nearly enough – and each continues to make efforts and try new solutions despite a sense that this is a never-ending problem. Most recently, a volunteer group in Tarentum has begun an early intervention initiative to help some property owners to hold the line on decline.

The problems

- Lack of data: The communities do not as a group or individually have complete, updated databases of problem properties on a continuum of early stages of disrepair, active decline or blight.
- Lack of a consistent, unified approach: Property deterioration in each of the three communities affects all three because they are contiguous municipalities. But as separate entities, they work individually, applying their own resources to the matter. Each community has specific strengths in terms of code enforcement, but also varying abilities to address the problem due to resource availability and funding.
- No overarching strategy: All three communities have pursued remedies on a case-by-case basis, but they have not individually or together developed a strategy for approaching the problem and applying solutions. Which problem properties are most important to address? Is it more important to prevent properties from tipping from "maintenance problems" to "blight," or to remove blighted properties? What should be the priority: Pockets of deteriorated properties, those in high-visibility areas? Those near well-maintained properties? Worst first?
- Full coordination with redevelopment efforts has not been established: The communities have successfully encouraged and supported redevelopment of specific buildings and or side yards on a case-by-case basis, but not on community-wide scales. A wider plan for addressing blight and tying it to redevelopment goals can help attract investment.
- Cumbersome processes: The requirements and process for dealing with long-term abandoned properties are time-consuming and full of legal and regulatory hurdles, some based on Allegheny County requirements.

Deterioration at one property harms the value of nearby, well-maintained properties

- Lack of coordination with Highlands School District: The communities currently are not working jointly with the School District on this issue.
- Toxic materials exposure: Adding to the difficulty or expense of removing dilapidated buildings are current or emerging regulations governing exposure to toxic substances, such as lead paint or asbestos, which can often be found in old buildings.
- High costs: Addressing the problem of property deterioration will require significant funding. Particularly vexing is a lack of funding for demolishing abandoned commercial property.
- Lack of strategies to assist homeowners: Some properties decline as owners lose physical or financial capacity to maintain their homes. Some first-time home owners may not know how to maintain property. Few programs are available to assist.
- Lack of awareness of programs: Some homeowners are not aware of programs such as the Allegheny County side lot acquisition opportunity or others.
- Public perception: Externally, a sense that the three communities "have a blight problem" may have detrimental effects on other efforts. Within the communities, an actual or perceived lack of progress frustrates neighbors and other citizens. We recognize that citizens may not be fully informed about the legal requirements involved in blight remediation, or the procedural and regulatory complexity of acquiring property, securing funding for demolition, and completing the work. More efforts at community education might be needed.

Looking Ahead

Property deterioration can best be addressed through a coordinated effort among the communities. Efforts to address property deterioration and blight should:

- Be developed jointly among the three communities, sharing services to the greatest degree feasible.
- Create common definitions within the continuum of property deterioration.
- Create and work from a unified, consistent and up-to-date database.
- Align with jointly developed overarching strategies that include prevention and remediation as well as removal and redevelopment.
- Be developed and implemented in the context of economic and community development goals and efforts.
- Emphasize strategies to assist people who live in substandard housing.

STRATEGIES: Improving the Condition of Properties and the Effects of Deterioration

High-priority strategy

1 **Using a multi-municipal approach, systematically pursue improvements as set forth in this chapter, overseen and driven by a multi-municipal "Blight Team." Work on addressing blight should be framed within the goals of this plan, and especially those related to economic development. The following steps align with a model adopted in Tarentum Borough, and can be applied or modified for a multi-municipal approach.**

✓ Making It Happen

❑ **Create a blight team.**

The blight team should include code enforcement officials and key stakeholders such as the municipalities' solicitors and representatives from selected community organizations with interest in housing, community health, equity, community development or related matters. It should include at least one comprehensive plan steering committee member from each community to serve as liaisons to their home communities' residents and elected officials.

The team should establish a regular meeting schedule. One person should oversee coordinating and managing the team.

❑ **Identify and pursue funding opportunities throughout the effort to support all the steps listed below.**

Agency, foundation and organizational funders. This should include typical sources such as CDBG, Keystone Communities, Neighborhood Assistance Program, and Neighborhood Partnership Program through DCED and PHARE/RTT through PHFA. Also consider sources such as the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, Rivers of Steel, and foundations that share an interest in eliminating blight or rehabilitating properties.

Collaboration with Council of Governments. HBT should initiate collective action to seek funding through Allegheny Valley North COG, as a multi-municipal approach may have more power.

Act 152 funding via Allegheny County. The blight group should apply for Act 152 funding through Allegheny County. This funding stream is generated via the Allegheny County Demolition Fund, which applies a new $15 fee to deed and mortgage recording transactions under PA Act 152. The Act allows counties to use such fees as a dedicated resource for demolishing blighted buildings.

Local funding via ordinance provisions. Consider adding a Neighborhood Mitigation Penalty in each municipality's property maintenance ordinances, as the City of Reading did:

"106.4.1 Neighborhood mitigation penalty.

"In addition to the foregoing fines, fees, penalties and/or restitution in PM 106.4, upon conviction of any violation of a provision of this code, an additional Neighborhood Mitigation Penalty (NMP) shall be levied in the amount of $50. All such NMPs levied and collected by any division of the unified judicial system existing under Section 1 of Article V of the Pennsylvania Constitution and 42 Pa.C.S.A. § 301, shall be remitted to the City of Reading for deposit into the Neighborhood Mitigation Fund for the purpose of funding mitigation exercises performed by the City on private properties, including but not limited to demolitions, cleanups, light repairs, abandoned vehicle towing, removal of trash and/or cutting of grass and weeds, etc. If any fine is paid on installments, the proportionate amount of the NMP shall be remitted on each installment."

- ❑ **Encourage property code enforcement and DPW collaboration and sharing among the three communities via the blight team.**

  Consistent code enforcement. The code enforcement staff at each community should meet annually to share knowledge and best practices that each can "bring home" to their own communities. This will help communities to align their actions and priorities to achieve changes that have the most impact.

  Unified and coordinated enforcement of landlord ordinances. Each of the three municipalities have similar landlord ordinances. The blight team and code enforcement staff should put the three ordinances side by side and arrive at a consolidated ordinance for landlords/investor residential properties so that all three municipalities have the same ordinance. They also should assemble a unified and shared investor-owned residential property date base or file.

- ❑ **Develop a legal definition of "blighted property."**

  A clear legal framework is essential to addressing blight, and this starts with the definition. The communities should add a definition to their ordinances, incorporating ideas from definitions provided in state laws and tapping the expertise of their solicitors and code enforcement officials. Note that some property may be in violation of the property maintenance code but not be a "blighted property" by definition; however, serious and chronic violations of the code may lead to a property being declared "blighted."

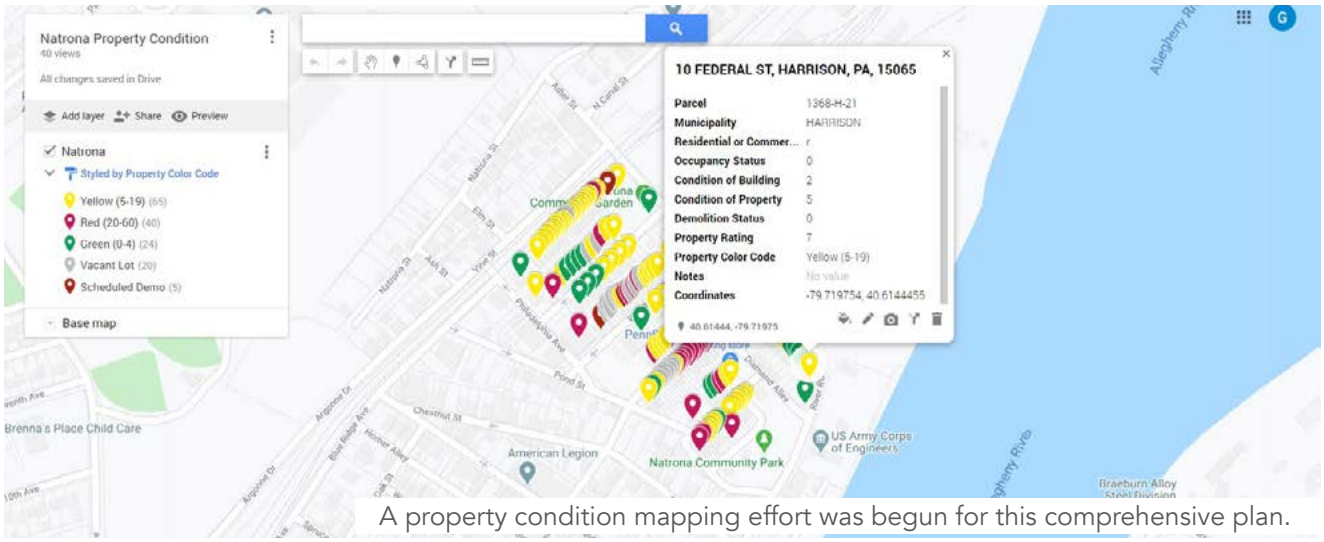
Collect and maintain data.

Map blight. The group must document occurrence of blight across the three communities by "coding" properties via visual review. A data-driven map will create a better understanding of the H-B-T landscape and create a blight database that can be jointly maintained into the future. This will facilitate applying/receiving grants to address blight, demolition, development and other property matters. Documentation of current conditions via mapping is something that grant reviewers look for when considering applications. The communities' blight team could create, populate and manage such a parcel-level database, which H-B-T could then employ to inform community decision-making and action.

The data collection and mapping can be done with the help of a small "army" of volunteers using a simple app on their phones and public webhosting for ease of access. Different mapping applications are available for doing this kind of survey-coding process, such as Landgrid, which includes a mobile app.

Note that consistent coding or ranking are essential here. Volunteers will need to receive training on how to code properties, aided with visual images and examples. This effort could be effectively led by the three communities' code enforcement officers, providing they first compare notes on property maintenance standards to identify and resolve any dissimilarities.

The resulting data is simply a point-in-time review, but a blight committee could maintain it to track progress.



A property condition mapping effort was begun for this comprehensive plan.

- NOTE: As part of implementation for this comprehensive plan, volunteers from the community began collecting data as shown in the sample above. This process is undertaken in collaboration with Faith Community Partners (FCP Services Inc.). A Quick Start guide for property condition mappis is in Appendix 3A. The process protocol is documented in Appendix 3B.
- A smaller approach would be to have each community identify a small number of their most serious blighted properties, gather key information on those properties and map them. Work through the

combined list to develop individual plans to address each property.

- A more ambitious approach to data collection and mapping would be to create and maintain a multi-municipal database for inspections, code violations and enforcement, such as the Turtle Creek Valley COG. This type of database should also include standards for assessing "what is blight," but even more fundamentally would facilitate consistent and cooperative application of standards, definitions, policies, priorities and goals.

Note the historic value of structures. Identify any buildings and structures that have historic value or that are significant to the community, and whether any can be saved. These could be prioritized based on their importance and the feasibility of saving the building or structure.

Citizens at the public meeting suggested investigating these properties as impressive buildings that might be good rehabilitation targets:

- Natrona Bank
- Knapek Store
- Silver Slipper (River Avenue)
- Chapman's Drug Store
- Drews Card Store

Learn more about rental properties in targeted areas. Conduct a block-by-block inventory of all properties in targeted neighborhoods to further identify useful information about rental properties: which are owner-occupied; landlords who consistently demonstrate responsibility vs. lack of care; vacancies; tax delinquencies; properties that appear to be beyond repair; owners who might be interested in minor repair assistance; and which properties might be for sale. This is a low-tech project; volunteers need a computer, internet, and a printer. Individuals would be recruited on a block by block basis who can help inform the process with the "details on the ground."

Assemble a list of properties for sale and determine their prospects for potential rehabilitation as well as those that are blighted. This could be for owner occupants and for potential rental properties.

❑ **Develop a robust multi-municipal strategy and approach to addressing blight.**

After mapping, the blight team should develop and present to councils an overarching approach for multi-municipal blight remediation. This approach should connect to market strength and align with the economic and community development goals of this comprehensive plan to ensure that progress is made once blighted properties are removed.

An overarching approach should include establishing priorities that help all three communities and support the other elements and goals of this comprehensive plan. Do the communities want to focus on their waterfronts? Their traditional downtowns? Gateways and corridors? Historic or important buildings or structures? Concentrated areas of blight? Blight near community assets?

❑ **Meet with the local magistrate.**

Once the team is established and a plan developed, elected officials from the three communities should hold a meeting with the local magistrate to educate her/him about the new plan and seek input, such as how best the communities can prepare cases for presentation.

❑ **Improve community awareness of all aspects of fighting blight.**

Raise the community profile about the problem and what H-B-T is doing. Make it an agenda item monthly at Council/Commission meetings and provide extensive public information about all steps related to addressing blight. For example, create a three-community document explaining blight, how it occurs and why it takes so long to address, and make this available to help with community education.

Inform public of assistance available through programs (such as side yard) or volunteer efforts (such as cleanups).

Conduct landlord and tenant information campaigns. Before implementing enforcement efforts, the municipalities should conduct a broad public education campaign with the landlords to bring registered owners up to compliance and to get non-registered landlords to register. Simultaneously, work with tenants to make sure they can prepare for any disruption in their housing situation.

Additional strategies

2 **Revise ordinances.**

Update ordinances governing inspection and licensure of rental units to prohibit rentals if the landlord has delinquent taxes, property maintenance citations, or delinquent utilities. (If one of the communities does not have a rental registry ordinance, it is recommended they adopt one. Further, property rental registration ordinances could require a local agent/property manager to be listed upon getting the license.)

3 **Pursue collaborative approaches within the multi-municipal framework.**

a. Consider an intergovernmental cooperation agreement to address demolition in a collaborative way, including for paying for equipment and labor. (The City of Johnston and the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority have an MOU that governs collaboration on selecting properties for demolition and paying for the demo/supplying the equipment/labor.)

b. Consider a multi-municipal shared services agreement or a joint third-party contract for cleaning up vegetation on vacant properties during the high grass and weed season. Keep a charge and cost log of the properties maintained to document costs and for potentially filing a tax lien on the properties.

4 Explore creating a regional land bank.

This is a long-term process; it can be years before properties are acquired. However, land-banking is a valuable tool that should not be overlooked. The first step will be to open conversations with Highlands School District, and this can be done immediately to begin building the relationships needed for future action. Funding for the startup of such an initiative could be available through private foundations.

5 Assist property owners.

A fund could be established that provides small grants or loans to residential property owners for minor house repairs or commercial property owners for façade improvements. Work with the library, local businesses or other groups to create courses that could help new homeowners learn how to maintain their property or make repairs. Create a list of properties where volunteer assistance is appropriate, and make matches. Review the process Tarentum set up for this and consider replicating it in the other communities.

Also, work with Allegheny County regarding potential funding for home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance programs via federal monies through CDBG or HOME.

6 Research and weigh other potential avenues for addressing blight, which are likely to be more complex but may have potential:

a. Advocate for a County Tax Claim Bureau that would collect delinquent taxes. As a County of the Second Class, Allegheny County does not have the authority to create a tax claim bureau. Adding the authority to do so would require legislative action. The three municipalities should approach the area's state representative and senator about proposing legislation to create a tax claim bureau, and approach Allegheny County Council representatives about potential future action to create, staff and fund the agency.

b. Demolition Authority. A steering committee member suggested examining the possibility of creating, implementing and carrying out of a Demolition Authority.

c. Cooperation with Utility Companies. A steering committee member suggested exploring ways for the joint municipalities to get consistent and updated information from utility companies (electric, gas, etc.) regarding account holder information. Municipalities currently have a difficult time tracking down who is responsible for the upkeep and property conditions at rental properties. While the owner is ultimately responsible for a property, it can be quicker and easier to get results from tenants, thereby preventing community blight and issues to linger. In conjunction, is there a way to cooperate with utilities so that blighted conditions could lead to service disconnections. These are some thoughts for Harrison and Brackenridge based upon Tarentum's model of using electric service and customers to tackle database and tenant issues.

MEETING THE COMMUNITIES' NEEDS FOR ACTIVITIES, EVENTS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The communities each provide residents with recreation opportunities and assets, including parks along or near the Allegheny River, Harrison Hills County Park and the Rachel Carson Regional Trail. By working together to plan facilities and events, the communities will able to offer more recreation options to more people.

4 CHAPTER IV TRAILS, PARKS AND RECREATION

KEY ISSUE: Trails, Parks and Recreation

Issue Overview

Recreation facilities and programs are some of the highest priority public services that contribute to community quality of life. Being outside in nature, enjoying exercise, recreation and leisure, and socializing in the company of neighbors are factors that enhance community and individual health and wellbeing.

As more people recognize the importance of outdoor and community activities, officials are increasingly considering trails, parks and recreation to be essential facilities and services directed toward meeting basic human needs.

Background and Context

The three Allegheny River Valley communities share several important characteristics and assets:

- Riverfront access
- Parkland
- Sidewalks and connectivity
- Trail planning
- Engaged citizens groups that assist with recreation planning

These are valuable and important to the communities and create a basis for additional opportunities that could have even greater impact. Therefore, this section of the comprehensive plan represents both "strengths to build on" and "problems to solve."

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum residents can safely access places, goods, services, employment, and care through a connected network that includes walking/biking routes. The communities capitalize on the recreation and leisure potential of the Allegheny River and the availability of parks and recreation. They coordinate recreation and planning efforts in order to make the most of tax dollars and grants, and to provide the greatest possible variety and quality of services for all residents.

The strengths

- Parkland: Riverview Memorial Park in

Tarentum, Brackenridge Borough Park, and the Fred C. Skwirut Memorial Park and Natrona Playground and Ballfield in Harrison include Allegheny River views, walking paths, play areas, sport courts, picnic shelters, monuments, ball fields and community gardens. Harrison Township's green space also includes the Township's Alsco Community Park and Silver Lake Park, and Bushman Ballfield. With improved community connections, concerted planning, program enhancements, and marketing efforts, these could become even more of a draw.

- Riverfront potential: Via the parks listed above, Brackenridge, Tarentum and Harrison have green space along their riverfronts. The Brackenridge Boat Club, a private marina, occupies about 1,000 linear feet of riverbank below that community's park. Private docks occupy a total of about 2,000 linear feet of riverbank in Tarentum below the community's park or private properties. An undeveloped public access point is available at the foot of Wood Street. Harrison Township has developed a Riverfront Plan, to include community connections.
- Historic and Cultural Assets: Links to the communities' past include the historic Burtner House, the Allegheny Kiski Valley Historical Society Heritage Museum, Chartiers Old Town, and the planned Row House Museum.
- Fish and Boat Commission launch area: A parking area, viewing platform, boat ramp, riverbank fishing area and seasonal dock occupy land under the Tarentum-New Kensington Bridge (SR 366).
- County Park: Allegheny County's Harrison Hills Park occupies 468 acres in Harrison Township.
- Sidewalks: Most or all portions of the communities in "the Flats," and some neighborhoods above the bluffs include sidewalks.
- Trail planning: The communities have been developing bicycle and walking connections. Harrison and Brackenridge have acquired planning grants and are moving toward implementation of specific routes that are part of or connect with the Three Rivers Heritage Trail. Over time, the coummunities' trunk route will align with other segments of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail to the south, and with the Butler-Freeport Trail and Tredway Trail to the north.
- Three Rivers Water Trail: Users may access a canoe/kayak trail on the Allegheny River at the Fish and Boat Commission launch in Tarentum or the Natrona launch at River Avenue and Linden Street in Harrison. Intrepid paddlers can move through the Army Corps of Engineers locks at Dam 4 in Harrison.
- Recreation Committees: The communities have several recreation committees that coordinate with Township or Borough administrations.

The problems

- No integrated plan for connecting community assets: The three communities do not have an overarching, integrated plan to link future development and existing assets such as commercial areas, parks, health care and external transit to employment.
- Lack of coordination of recreation: Each community has its own recreation committee (or two of them). Coordination, collaboration and shared services would reduce redundancy and make the most of valuable volunteer efforts.
- No coordination of park planning: Each community has developed its own parks, which are in proximity to each other. This creates a situation in which space is not always used well, and redundant equipment is installed. Joint planning would help all three communities limit costs of both installation and maintenance.
- Under-emphasis of Harrison Hills Park and ALSCO Park: The County-owned Harrison Hills Park

appears to be a somewhat untapped asset that could be emphasized more as a destination and an important community feature. Lack of transit and trail connectivity makes it difficult to reach for those without vehicles. Meanwhile, the ALSCO Park is little used because of lingering mistrust about its safety, since it was constructed atop a capped toxic waste dump.

- Lack of open space conservation and planning: Tarentum and Harrison, especially, have large areas of green space, steep slopes, and stream networks. Without long-term land use planning, there are few mechanisms to encourage preservation and support of natural systems, or to create sustainable conservation and recreation opportunities.
- Lack of coordinated planning for Silver Lake Park. The development site that includes Silver Lake Park land lies within Harrison Township but abuts the other two communities. Though a concept design has been prepared, there has been little or no joint discussion about the project. The project is targeted to be implemented as part of a proposed commercial development at the property, which lies at the southeast corner of the Route 28/Route 366 interchange.
- Limited river access: Despite Allegheny River frontage, the communities do not have many access points for fishing and boating, or associated parking.

Looking Ahead

The communities can benefit from increased community connectivity and the assets of river access, riverfront views, parkland and recreation. Next steps should include efforts that:

- Coordinate an approach to planning of park assets and use of parkland.
- Coordinate recreation initiatives, programs, events and services.
- Plan multi-municipal connectivity and trails within the three communities and with external destinations or routes. This network should include associated features such as wayfinding, promotion, programming, and connection with other community assets.
- Capitalize on river access and riverfront views, which potentially can be a factor for all three communities as they pursue social enterprise, community and economic development goals.
- Recognize parks, greenspace, watersheds and the river as potential learning centers.
- Embrace conservation and preservation of open space, greenspace and natural systems or potential planning for an eco-district.

STRATEGIES: Improving Trails, Parks & Recreation

High Priority Strategy

1 **A multi-municipal trails, parks and recreation group should begin working on joint programs and events, and planning of public facilities and trails.**

This plan suggests the communities form a formal or informal collaborative group to plan and mount events, and plan future recreation facilities and trails. A formal arrangement as explained below; would be most durable and most likely to attract funding assistance. However, even an informal group can be effective. Once established, the group should start planning shared and joint efforts such as facilities planning, maintenance or programming.

✓ Making It Happen

❑ **Convene a joint trails, parks and recreation group in some form to serve as the implementation committee for the strategies set out in this comprehensive plan. This should include representatives from all three communities and the school district, and could also involve the comprehensive plan working group that has focused on Trails, Parks and Recreation, and some new volunteers.**

A joint planning and implementation group will be in the best position to encourage collaboration among the three communities, and serve as the clearinghouse for shared initiatives such as grant applications. The point of this effort is to work jointly rather than in isolation on facilities, programs and other efforts, with the goal of maximizing effectiveness in developing partnerships with local businesses and institutions, in providing residents with the widest menu of activities and programs, and to increase likelihood of attracting funding.

At its initial meeting, the group should review the contents of this comprehensive plan and set priorities for implementation.

Currently, each of the communities plans trails independently and operates a Recreation Board, as shown here:

How does it work currently?

HARRISON: The township operates a six-member recreation board and seven member citizen advisory committee. Their purpose is to contribute to improved health and wellness spirit in the community, bringing together old and young to participate in community-wide recreational programs and events. Examples are park cleanups, holiday events.

BRACKENRIDGE: The borough's three-member recreation committee focuses on park facilities and operations.

TARENTUM: The borough's nine-member recreation board hosts community events including the Summer Concert Series, Senior Bingo and holiday parade events. It meets on the last Tuesday of each month. In addition, an ad hoc group has also begun planning additional activities.

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum should consider a model that has operated effectively in four Beaver County communities for almost two decades. The four communities and the school district they share use the model explained on the following pages.

New Brighton Area Recreation Commission (NBARC)

PURPOSE: The commission includes representatives from the Boroughs of New Brighton and Fallston, the Townships of Pulaski and Daugherty, and the New Brighton Area School District. Its purpose is to operate playground programs, maintain landscaping at athletic fields, and provide recreation services currently not being met in the community. The property and facilities utilized are owned, maintained, and insured by the five governmental members.

Background: The commission was formed by an intergovernmental agreement in 2002, and adopted by Ordinance or Resolution by four communities and school district. A nine-member board is appointed by the governing bodies to serve on the Commission. The commission began meeting monthly in 2003. Please see model intergovernmental agreement, which includes the commission's bylaws, Appendix 4A

Before the commission was created, the communities and school district operated an authority, which included oversight of a public swimming pool. When the school district took on oversight of the pool, the authority was no longer needed and the five parties formed the commission that remains in operation.

How It Works:

- Representation on the nine-member commission is proportional by population. The share ratios are: School District: 3; New Brighton: 2; Daugherty: 2; Pulaski: 1; Fallston: 1.
- The commission's budget was created at $50,000 annually. Cash contributions by the home communities are proportional by population and billed monthly. The share ratios are: School District: 50%; New Brighton: 25.11%; Daugherty: 16.8%; Pulaski: 6.2%; Fallston: 1.89%.
- The participating communities and school district each maintain their own recreation facilities, though the commission maintains the school district ballfields, which get used by community-based leagues/associations. Routine inspections of play areas are conducted by a member of the commission who is a certified playground inspector.
- If one participating community or the school district wants or needs a capital improvement, that governing body assumes financial responsibility for the project. If a grant is sought, the home community or school district writes the grant application and provides the base financial contribution. The NBARC may vote to provide a financial match, particularly if the identified improvement benefits all the participating communities and school district. To facilitate the

grant process, the commission as well as the member bodies typically write letters of support to be included in grant applications, which grantors have stated are highly desirable.

- The commission pays monthly stipends to two New Brighton Borough employees – the assistant borough manager ($300) and her assistant ($150) – to serve as recreation coordinators for programs that the commission jointly plans and operates.
- The recreation and community programs held each year are selected by the commission. The nine commissioners plus the two recreation coordinators and community volunteers staff the events. The planned 2020 events were (with some rescheduling or other changes due to restrictions caused by the pandemic:

a. Two "5K and Fun Walks"
b. A sanctioned triathlon (USA Triathlons)
c. Movies in the Park
d. A summer playground program run in conjunction with the YMCA.
e. Rivers Casino trips

Effectiveness Tips from the NBARC Recreation Coordinator: The NBARC recreation coordinator (Nicole Oliver) explained that this five-party collaboration has worked smoothly for decades in different iterations – first as an authority, and currently as a commission.

- What makes the partnership work well, she said, is that the communities already have the common bond of the school district. Moreover, the communities see the value in collaboration and the "get along." People often travel from one community to another for shopping, work or other purposes, so going from one place to another for recreation feels natural.
- When collaboration doesn't go so well, it usually is a problem with the challenges of mounting an event, and the problem can be traced to a lack of volunteer support from the community, she said. For example, it takes a lot of people to host a triathlon, and sometimes there just aren't enough helping hands. The communities should understand that recreation takes help beyond the nine members of the commission.
- Joint planning creates cohesiveness among the communities and helps them avoid redundancy or duplicated efforts. "You don't need three Halloween Parades," she said. "Everybody can go to one parade."
- If Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum (and Highlands School District) form a commission or other formal body, they should invite someone from the County Parks division to participate since Harrison Hills County Park is within the area. This could help build an important alliance.
- No matter what form the collaboration takes, the important thing is communication. "If you have that, then you're not forming those old ideas like 'this town is better than that town.' "

NBARC's program sponsors: Back Door Tavern, Beaver Valley Remodeling, Brighton Health Mart, Corner Grill, Craig's Hardware, Evolution Audio, Fancy Plants & Bloomers, Fisher's Foodland, Frank Hacko Insurance & Notary, Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie 1342, Gabauer-Lutton Funeral Home, Hall's Lawn Care, Louis Capo, CPA, Marbulls, Mr. Trophy, Oak Hill Veterans Association, Robert J. Baker, DMD PC, Rosalind Candy Castle, The Sports Factory, United Croation Club, Valeria D. Martone DMD MSD, Widmer Engineering

CONTACT: Nicole Oliver, NBARC.net

❑ **Working together, the communities should first undertake joint programs, because that is the simplest form of collaboration. Create a consolidated, joint calendar of events and publish it on all three websites.**

EXISTING: Participants in the public process for this comprehensive plan identified these activities, events and programs as ones they currently participate in or attend.

- Tree plantings or community cleanups
- Community gardens
- Fireworks
- Volunteer fire companies
- Performances or movies in a park
- Youth sports leagues
- Programs at Harrison Hills Park Environmental Learning Center
- Hiking on Rachel Carson Trail

FUTURE ACTIVITIES: Residents perceived the following activities as gaps in recreation programming in the three communities. They should be considered:

- Roller skating all ages event
- **Pet parade**
- Battle of the bands
- Wellness/fitness programs such as yoga
- Adult education classes to teach home repair skills
- Summer schedule of arts and music festivals with food
- Beer/wine tastings
- Fall festival
- Painting, Zumba, Yoga classes in the park
- Contests for youth to spruce up areas of the community.

Pet Parade

The communities should schedule a Pet Parade - as a pilot project, as it is relatively easy to put on, and is likely to be a true crowd-pleaser. Here is a checklist.

a. Recruit planning team. Please see sample registration and volunteer application forms in Appendix 4B and 4C.

b. Select date. September/October window is suggested as not too hot for people and animals.

c. Identify a location. Considerations should include availability of restrooms, parking and water source, convenience and fees.

d. Theme/judging/prizes. This could be a Halloween- or fall-oriented pet costume parade, with prizes for best-dressed, best-behaved, best "Tricker," best "Treater," etc. Judges could be elected officials and children.

e. Booths/sponsors. Local pet stores, groomers and other businesses can be solicited for prizes. Parameters should be established for booth space, with fee structures offering discounts for non-profits but not for for-profit companies. Arrangements need to be made for electricity if needed, but booth vendors should provide their own tents, tables and chairs, along with requirements for completing set-up and cleanup.

f. Determine if there will be food vendors or food trucks.

g. Comfort stations. Rented portable toilets are expensive, so existing facilities would be a plus.

h. Permits and public safety. Consider street closures, police, fire department, EMS. Make sure masks, hand sanitizer, pet clean-up materials, garbage collection are lined up.

i. Water supply. Encourage everyone to bring water for their pets.

j. Publicity and how to participate: Participants should have to register, including listing what kind of pet they are bringing. Many will be surprising, adding to the fun! Rules should include maximum length of leash, and that all animals are current with their shots and licenses.

❑ **The multi-municipal group should commence joint planning for future facilities as a way of saving money and effort, and targeting to meet community needs.**

The group should assess existing facilities shown on the map on the facing page, and formulate an achievable plan for maximizing the facilities' use and maintenance.

EXISTING FACILITIES: Participants in the public process for this comprehensive plan identified these facilities in the three communities as particularly valuable:

- Community parks and playgrounds in Brackenridge, Tarentum and Natrona
- Rachel Carson Trail
- Harrison Hills Park (Allegheny County park)

FUTURE FACILITIES: Residents perceived these as gaps in recreation facilities in the three communities:

- Outdoor basketball court in Brackenridge
- Boat rides for kids
- Kitchen area for Natrona Community Park
- Driving range
- **Ice skating**
- Indoor play area at Lloyd D. Hayden Community Center, Sheldon Park (County Housing Authority facility)

Skating Rink

A skating rink is probably the most feasible and likely to be considered useful and exciting to residents of all three communities. It could potentially be installed in ALSCO Park or a riverfront park. The communities should consider using a seasonal membrane rink and edge. This can be filled with water and left to freeze, then opened up for free public use.

TribLive photo of the McCahill Field seasonal rink in Fox Chapel

In 2010, Fox Chapel Borough first set up a new 52-by-88-foot rounded rectangle rink, costing $4,500. Today a membrane and edge costs about $8,000.

In some communities, skates are collected by donation, and borrowed/used by skaters then returned to the "borrow table" when the skaters leave. This model could be considered as a means of encouraging equal access to winter recreation.

Symbol Key

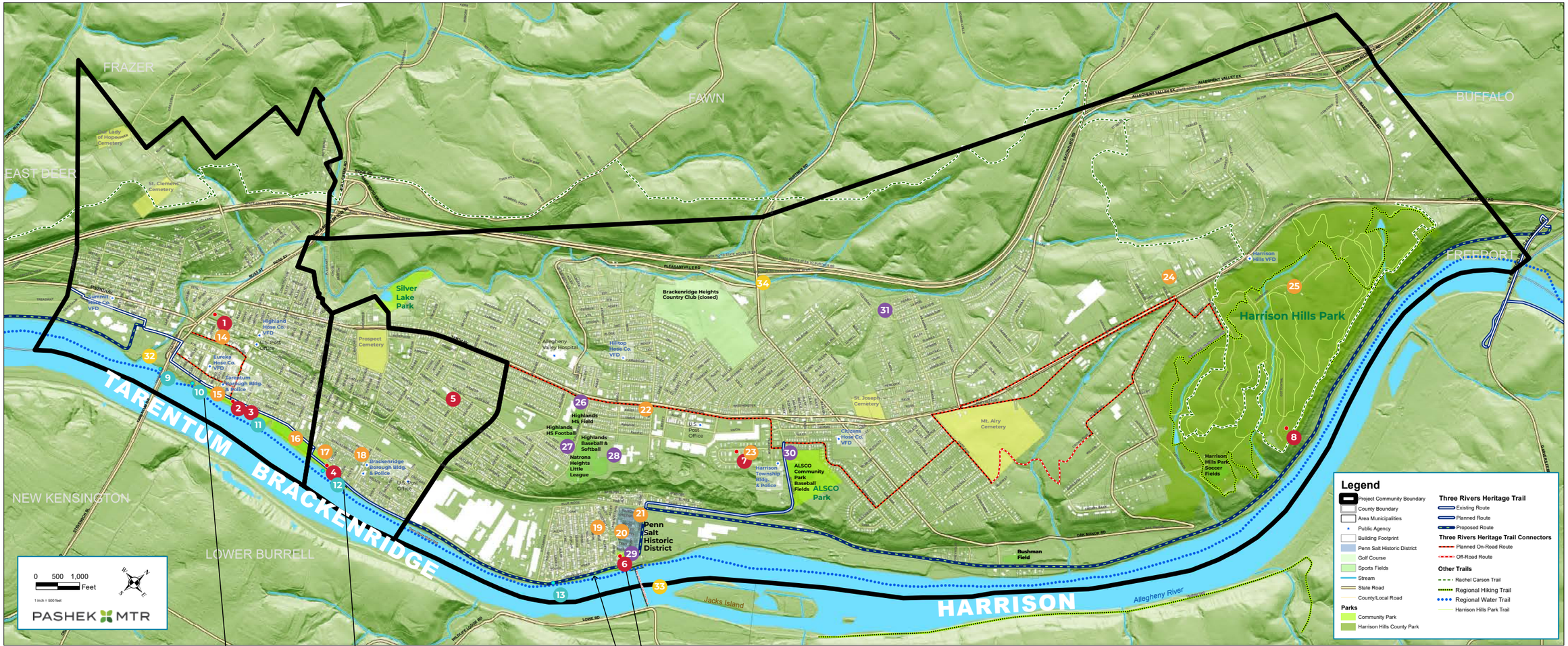
Play Areas
1. Highlands Elementary School Playground
2. Riverview Park Spray Park
3. Riverview Park Playground
4. Brackenridge Memorial Park Playground
5. Highlands Early Childhood Center Playground
6. Natrona Community Park Playground
7. Sheldon Park Neighborhood Playground
8. Harrison Hills Park Play Areas

River Access Points
9. Tarentum Fish & Boat Commission Launch
10. Wood Street River Access
11. Tarentum Boat Docks
12. Brackenridge Boat Docks
13. Three Rivers Water Trail Access

Activity Centers
14. Alle-Kiski Heritage Museum
15. Riverview Park Amphitheater
16. Tarentum Community Garden
17. Veterans of Foreign Wars
18. Allegheny Valley Salvation Army
19. American Legion Hall
20. Penn Salt History Museum
21. Natrona Community Garden
22. Allegheny Valley Library
23. Deborah D. Booker Community Center
24. Allegheny Valley YMCA
25. Harrison Hills Environmental Learning Ctr.

Fitness
26. Natrona Sports Courts
27. Highlands Middle School Walking Track
28. Highlands School District Tennis Courts
29. Highlands High School Pool
30. ALSCO Tennis Courts
31. Sylvan Pool

Historic & Cultural Structures
32. Chartiers Old Town
33. Army Corps of Engineers Lock & Dam No. 4
34. Burtner House



HARRISON-BRACKENRIDGE-TARENTUM
Implementable Comprehensive Plan

Recreation Resources Map

PASHEK MTR

❑ **Investigate state Department of Recreation and Natural Resources programs that encourage multi-municipal collaborations on recreation staffing, funding and technical assistance.**

The Peer and Circuit Rider grant programs fund projects that help municipalities, counties, multi-municipal partnerships, and councils of governments to increase local capacity for recreation, parks and conservation.

- The Peer program funds projects that, through a collaborative process, focus on a specific need identified by the grantee and its partners.
- The Circuit Rider program aids in the hiring of a full-time park, recreation or conservation professional whose services are shared by the members of a formal partnership, commission or authority. These grant opportunities are available and open year-round with no application deadline.
- Please see Peer program and Circuit Rider grant information, Appendix 4D.

Other Strategies

2 **Create a unified, multi-municipal approach to trail network development. This includes:**

a. The joint recreation group should review the Three Rivers Heritage Trail maps and status of implementation within each of the three communities so people in Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum all are aware of each other's plans, and can begin to pursue projects and grants on a multi-municipal basis.

   Using trail planning resources and best practices as well as feedback from the public collected via this comprehensive planning process, determine where improvements could be made to the trail route. One very useful idea is to revise the Three Rivers Heritage Trail route to include spurs or alternative routes through the traditional downtowns of Tarentum, Brackenridge and Natrona, to drive traffic to the commercial districts as well as the riverfront, and achieve other goals and priorities.

b. Initiate discussions with the Rachel Carson Trail organization about trail use, events and operations and potential cooperation or joint efforts between the trail conservancy and the three communities. The northern trail terminus is in Harrison Hills Park, and this trail is a local asset with some regional significance.

c. Open conversations with trail planners in East Deer to the south and Freeport (Butler County) to the north to identify next steps toward creating external connections to the larger trail network. It is the larger regional trail network that will significantly increase the value and profile of the routes in Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum and play an important role in establishing the communities as Trail Towns. As noted previously in this chapter, trail connectivity is an increasingly desirable asset or amenity for attracting the next residents and business owners.

d. Assemble a meeting of key stakeholders to review trail options and plans, and to build interest in your potential projects. Take a multi-municipal approach to conferring with the stakeholders (including some potential funders) listed here:

   - Adam Mattis, DCNR Southwest Regional Office Advisor: phone/email

- Andy Baechle, Allegheny County Parks and trails, phone/email
- Ann Ogoreuc, Allegheny County Economic Development-Transportation, phone/email
- John Stephens, Rachel Carson Trail, phone/email
- Courtney Mahronich Vita, Friends of the Riverfront, phone/email
- Brett Hollern, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, phone/email
- Darla Cravotta, Allegheny County Office of Special Projects, County Executive, phone/email
- Bill Lesterick, PennDOT District 11-Active Transportation planning, phone/email
- Leann Chaney, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission-Active Transportation, phone/email
- Melissa Girty, Port Authority of Allegheny County, phone/email
- Chris Ziegler, Butler-Freeport Trail and Armstrong Trail, (724) 822-7176
- Lance Welliver, Butler County Parks, phone/email

e. Following the stakeholders meeting, refine a list of trail development priorities and formulate a funding matrix for these projects, seeking where feasible to apply as a multi-municipal group. Matrix to include funding source/grant, deadlines, matching information and other specifics.

3 **Create communications and volunteer engagement mechanisms.**

a. Publicize public recreation facilities and assets found in the three communities, such as on municipal websites or via new joint website or social media group.

b. Publicize the multi-municipal map of trail routes and status of new project implementation within each of the three communities. Work with trail organizations or websites to have H-B-T routes included on their maps, such as:

- https://trails.dcnr.pa.gov/
- https://www.alltrails.com/
- https://friendsoftheriverfront.org/three-rivers-heritage-trail/

c. Using the publicity means identified above as contact with local social media groups and large employers such as ATI and Allegheny Valley Hospital, recruit volunteers for initiatives related to parks, recreation and trails.

4 **Use the riverfront development concept plan drawings presented in the "Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development" chapter to select potential public access improvements to help connect the three communities to the Allegheny River, one of the area's most important assets.**

5 **Review land-use maps and ordinances to identify parcels that could be acquired by their home communities, potentially with the assistance of grant funding, to be conserved for open space, future park land and stormwater management or resource conservation purposes.**

THE COMMUNITIES OUTLASTED THEIR IDENTITY AS "STEEL TOWNS," AND NOW SEEK A NEW DEFINITION

The three communities do not have a commonly understood description of how they see themselves today and in the future.

5 CHAPTER V COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND BRANDING

KEY ISSUE: Community Identity and Branding

Issue Overview

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum are distinctive places with rich and complex histories and an ambition to be known for being convenient places to live, that have a small-town feel, affordable housing, and amenities like parks, trails, recreation options, walkability and Allegheny River views. The three communities desire to assemble a "toolkit" for communicating both internally to local people and externally to the greater Pittsburgh area all the valuable characteristics they embody, offer and hope to become.

Vision

Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum attract and retain residents, businesses and investment by marketing themselves successfully through a commonly held identity or brand.

Background and Context

During the 20th Century, the communities of Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum were (speaking generally) steel mill and manufacturing towns that supported local economies driven by residents of European heritage who earned sufficient wages to live middle-class lives. These residents owned their homes, shopped locally, joined community organizations and churches, and sent their kids to local schools.

As populations shrank and disinvestment followed, the small downtowns faltered and some properties deteriorated. Over a few decades, the communities became more affordable to lower-income residents, and Allegheny County constructed various public-housing facilities. New residents moved in, though the populations continued to fall. The communities became more diverse and less centered on steel mill and manufacturing employment. The opening of Route 28 and the growth of "eds and meds" jobs in Pittsburgh to some degree turned this part of Allegheny County into a bedroom community.

Concurrently, a sense of community created by membership and participation in faith communities fell away as population and attendance dwindled. Houses of worship and parochial schools closed as congregations were consolidated, leaving some residents without one traditional hometown "anchor." In the public-school district, which typically is

From left, locations in Harrison, Tarentum and Brackenridge

another a source of community cohesiveness, population decline led to elementary school closures; this consolidation represented the loss of another neighborhood anchor.

As these transformations occurred, the communities' self-image as Allegheny Valley steel towns no longer held true (although ATI continues to operate in Harrison and employs about 500 people from throughout the region).

"We're not an old mill town anymore," as one local elected official stated, "but what are we?" Now, in the third decade of the 21st Century, the three communities do not have a commonly understood description of how they see themselves today and in the future. One community activist noted that lack of identity for the three communities, defining it as "the area between Exits 14 and 15 off Route 28, and down to the river."

Moreover, there are different ideas of how unified the three communities are or can become. One local community activist said during the public input process for this plan: "Harrison Township and the neighboring boroughs are territorial. My generation and younger call our area 'Highlands,' but some elected officials don't see it that way."

Historic patterns of mistrust may also affect the communities' self-perception and identity. A community stakeholder interviewed for this plan provided a potent explanation of how a loss of manufacturing jobs and resultant decline in individual and community financial security in 1970-2010 occurred simultaneously with in-migration of populations with lower socio-economic status. This concurrency led some long-time residents to adopt a belief that the larger demographic representation of disadvantaged individuals or minority groups – rather than the loss of manufacturing jobs - caused the decline in economic conditions.

The stakeholder believes that this misunderstanding of regional and national trends created a fear of "the other" that can only be addressed through communication and open, honest conversations. This undercurrent of mistrust is likely amplified by what many see as a persistent lack of coordination and communication between the Allegheny County Housing Authority (which provides low-income housing) and the three communities.

The problems

Progress-dependent: Marketing the community is interrelated with progress on the other Key Issues.

Lack of an identity: There is no articulated and commonly held revised-for-the future self-image of Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum.

Visibility and Reputation: The communities have a low profile or perhaps are not viewed entirely positively from the outside.

Divided views I: Individuals have different assessments of how distinct the three communities are or should be, and whether they are united now or can unite behind a vision.

Divided views II: Individuals have different assessments of the degree to which socio-economic, racial/ethnic, political and age-based differences in viewpoints can be overcome in the interest of a common vision.

Limited resources: The communities individually may have difficulty marshalling resources to achieve goals matching their vision for the future. However, collaboration and shared services can be tools for doing more.

Looking Ahead

We feel that the communities share strengths, assets and challenges, many of which this comprehensive plan will seek to address. Creating a joint "identity" or "brand" should include efforts that:

- Articulate a shared understanding of the communities as they are today and as they hope to be in the next five to 10 years
- Reflect the cultural, human, historical, ecological and built assets the three communities share or plan to develop
- Support the Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum vision for social enterprise, community and economic development
- Can result in official and informal marketing and promotion efforts by the communities together or individually.

STRATEGIES: Improving Community Identity And Branding

High-priority strategy

1 Identify and convene a team that can pursue the Community Identity and Branding initiatives over time.

The team should include some members of the Community Identity comprehensive plan working group and new volunteers with expertise in media relations, marketing and branding. Because the Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum area's community identity may encompass new facets or features as other elements of the comprehensive plan are implemented, the team should strive to keep abreast of other work under way in the communities.

1. Along with that, the team will be responsible for engaging community partners to enhance the value of any efforts pursued in this Key Issue topic. Finally, team members will also be liaisons for the three communities' elected officials and professional staff members.
2. Develop a website for the comp plan initiatives that can serve as a communications device in the future to house content such as the Community Identity hometown stories or the trail maps; to recruit volunteers; to post news; and to reflect implementation. This could be a new website, or the section of the Tarentum site devoted to the plan. Items posted on the site can be shared via existing and new social media partners and platforms.

✓ Making It Happen

- ❑ **Discuss the Community Identity and Branding initiative with existing groups such as the a new CDC operating in the three communities,the Business Improvement Group in Brackenridge, other merchants groups, the Chamber of Commerce, Highlands Partnership Network, social media partners and others. Use this opportunity to identify future participants in a branding effort.**
- ❑ **Hold a 2- or 3-hour brainstorming creative meeting with local professionals working in the marketing, advertising and design fields to begin a discussion about how to identify this area via a logo and geographic designator.**

Other strategies

2 Develop a "community identity" through storytelling.

A community identity articulated through storytelling is a more thoughtful and inclusive process, with a nuanced product.

The Community Identity team will work with partner organizations to identify common themes and

community attributes that can be the foundation for articulating an identity and driving a marketing campaign. This process uses proven methodology for community story gathering and focus group facilitation to gather stories from community members across the stakeholder spectrum. It can borrow some ideas from the "Community Heart and Soul" process (https://www.orton.org/what-we-do/) to ask these questions of residents and business owners:

- Why do you love it here?
- Why do you stay here?
- What makes it feel like home?

The individual stories that people convey as well as the themes or characteristics that are seen when the stories are viewed together comprise the community identity of Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum. A series of focus groups can help identify themes and distill meaning.

3 **Create a community branding campaign. Following story gathering and community outreach efforts, the Community Identity team and partners will synthesize the information gathered to identify common themes about life in the community. Focus groups can help distill meaning from a collection of individual stories.**

a. From this distillation, it should be possible to articulate a slogan that captures the character of the area. Both the stories and the slogan are parts of the community's identity. Local experts in graphic design, marketing and communications can create visuals that reflect that effort.
b. As part of this, strive to develop a geographic shorthand name for the area that will assist with external communications, helping people from outside Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum to understand the communities' location on the Allegheny River in northern Allegheny County.

NOTE: During the development of this implementable comprehensive plan, a working group received advice from Visit Pittsburgh on how a community can articulate its identity through the stories of people, places, businesses and organizations. See notes in Appendix 5A.

4 **Create talking points for business owners, media, faith community, neighbors, and distribute them to media outlets, Visit Pittsburgh, state and county elected officials and others who can share important stories and information about Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum.**

5 **Create a digital and printed map identifying community assets and public amenities as well as historic locations and properties. This can service as a tool for communicating the three communities' identity and brand.**

MORE TO CONSIDER

Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum could potentially address other problems most effectively by using a joint approach begun through the steps in this comprehensive plan. This chapter lists some of those opportunities.

6 CHAPTER VI ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Implementable comprehensive plans focus their content heavily on "Key Issues" that the public process identified as the most important and most feasible to address in the coming years. Those topics typically warrant whole chapters for each. The public process also identified topics that either had less priority or were considered less feasible to address.

We include a section called Additional Topics to recognize the matters that arose during the public process but did not become Key Issues because they were viewed to be of lower priority or highly unlikely to be successfully addressed through the comprehensive planning process.

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

ISSUE: Lack of transportation creates and perpetuates inequity and hardship in the three communities. People in the three communities who don't have their own cars have significant difficulty getting to grocery stores or accessing health care and other needed services due to distance, topography and a lack of public transit.

Statement of support

- This comprehensive plan supports increased and improved transit/shuttle services to enable residents of Harrison-Brackenridge-Tarentum to access food stores, health care, goods and services, employment and recreation.

INFRASTRUCTURE

ISSUE: Road maintenance and improvements are crucial to all communities, and this is particularly difficult for Brackenridge, which does not qualify for some state funding due to its small size. At the same time, heavy truck traffic from local industries damages roads and is highly disruptive to the quietude of residential neighborhoods.

Strategies

- Explore creating a road impact fee for truck use on local roads.
- Consider establishing an official truck route through the communities to divert heavy vehicles away from quiet residential areas, parks and trail routes.
- Develop a list, by community, of needed road improvements, arranged by priority and road owner. In cases where projects are on more than one community's list, create a multi-municipal plan for pursuing funding, by approaching state representatives, PennDOT, Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission to elevate awareness of need.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES AND HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT

ISSUE: The three communities lie entirely within the Highlands School District, but there is arrangement for sharing information or communicating between the governing bodies. This can lead to missed opportunities at best and suspicion, competition for resources and mistrust at worst.

Strategy

- Begin holding liaison meetings among one or two volunteers from each elected body. These should be held semi-annually. The first meeting should discuss:
  a. How to build collaboration among elected officials
  b. Projects or ideas to explore or undertake together, such as producing a multi-municipal public festival showcasing student achievements in art, music, robotics, voluntarism, other projects.
  c. A potential joint effort is development of a land bank, which would require participation by the school district and municipal governments.

CRIME

ISSUE: Some residents participating in the public process perceived crime to be an important problem to solve in the three communities. A review of uniform crime statistics showed that a spike in some forms of crime had occurred in the communities in 2016-17, possibly related to the opioid epidemic, but that no trend of increased crime appeared to be continuing in 2018-2020. However, since even low statistical levels of crime can disrupt communities, neighborhoods and households, this comprehensive plan recommends the steps listed below.

Strategies

- All three communities should join a communications service such as Savvy Citizen, perhaps recruiting a local business to support the service on an annual basis. Use this, as well as informal social networks such as NextDoor.com, to notify citizens when emergencies occur to begin to establish an understanding that crime and public emergencies are not as common as may be perceived.
- Create a section on each website showing incidences of crime and trend lines, as well as crime prevention techniques.
- Some property crimes are associated with substance abuse problems. Therefore, the communities' governing bodies should further develop partnerships with the two large health-care providers specifically to help inform residents of resources or connect people to services. The goal is to help families and individuals access health care or mental health care, including treatment for substance use disorders. A result of this assistance is likely to be a reduction in property crimes, such as burglary and theft.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE PENNSYLVANIA MUNICIPALITIES PLANNING CODE

In order for the governing bodies of Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum to approve this comprehensive plan, the proposed plan must be reviewed by Allegheny County for consistency with the county's own comprehensive plan (Allegheny Places), and the plan must meet the requirements of the state Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) Article III, Section 301. The following is a summary of those MPC requirements and a comparison of where that information is included in this comprehensive plan. Where the key issues did not include an element listed in the MPC, we address that following the chart.

CONSISTENCY TABLE

MPC Requirement	Where it can be found in the Forging Our Future Comprehensive Plan
Statement of Community Development Objectives	Refer to the Additional Topics chapter.
Plan for land use	Refer to the Community and Economic Development and Additional Topics chapters.
Plan to meet housing needs	Refer to the Blight and Community and Economic Development chapters. Also see Community Development Objectives.
Plan for movement of people and goods	Refer to the Trails, Parks and Recreation and Additional Topics chapter of the plan.
Plan for community facilities	Community facilities are addressed in the Trails, Parks and Recreation and the Community and Economic Development chapters of the plan.
Statement of Interrelationship among various plan components	The nature of the Implementable Comprehensive Plan is to focus on major issues in the Community. Each issue tends to address multiple planning elements in an integrated manner.
Short- and long-term implementation strategies	Found in each chapter for each issue.
Statement that existing and proposed development is compatible with existing and proposed development in adjacent communities and consistent with "Allegheny Places," the Allegheny County comprehensive plan.	The Community Development Objectives addresses consistency with adjacent municipality development. The proposals in this plan are consistent with the Allegheny County Plan.

MPC Requirement	Where it can be found in the Forging Our Future Comprehensive Plan
Plan for protection of natural and historic resources	See Trails, Parks and Recreation chapter and Community Development Objectives.
Plan for reliable supply of water	The Allegheny County comprehensive plan indicates that the water supply for these three municipalites is adequately served via Harrison Township Water Authority, Brackenridge Borough, and Tarentum Borough.
Plan to be reviewed in 10 years	This plan recommends in the Introduction that this process be updated in 10 years.
Careful analysis of all of the elements	We believe that the Key Issues identified by the three communities were developed in a careful manner that incorporated most of the planning elements of the MPC.
Adoption process	To take place in 2020/2021.

Steering future community development

One implementation step in this comprehensive plan is a suggestion that the communities update and revise their subdivision and land development (SALDO) and zoning ordinances entirely or by amending or revising sections.

Zoning and subdivision and land development are sometimes revised in tandem with comprehensive planning because these ordinances can support and propel the kinds of changes that are sought in an implementable plan. Revised SALDO and zoing ordinances can be one of the tools the communities employ to make sure they are steering future growth and development in the directions they have chosen. For example, zoning ordinances and maps build on goals for community development by adding specificity about what kinds of development should occur, where, and in what manner. And the design and other standards for public and private improvements in a subdivision and land development ordinance affect the quality of proposed development.

New zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances could help one or all the communities achieve their goals related to the chapters on Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development, Blight, and Trails, Parks and Recreation.

This section of the Forging Our Future comprehensive plan sets out Community Development Objectives, which are a primary building block of zoning ordinances. The objectives, which appear on the next page, align with the intention of the comprehensive plan.

Statement of Community Development Objectives for Harrison, Brackenridge and Tarentum, PA

- Generally maintain and protect the historic pattern of development in each community, respecting the street grid, the original bulk and massing of buildings and the ability to embed civic, institutional and commercial activity into specified neighborhoods and districts at an appropriate scale.
- Incentivize mixed uses, particularly in downtowns, including residential living on the upper floors of commercial uses.
- Build flexibility into local regulations to accommodate innovative uses and activity such as "pop-up" businesses, food trucks and micro-breweries.
- Encourage a broad range of housing types and price levels within neighborhoods to bring people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, income levels, ages and abilities into daily interaction, strengthening community life.
- Use dimensional standards to reinforce a cohesive built environment for each district while ensuring that infill and redevelopment are viable options for vacant and underutilized property.
- Guide the design of the public realm to ensure quality, visually attractive development that becomes a significant asset to the community.
- Respect pedestrians and the form of public space in accomodating vehicles, incorporating best practices for access management and the creation of "complete streets." Ensure that parking is not overbuilt.
- Ensure safe and efficient bicycle and pedestrian movement, promoting the development of trail and other non-motorized mobility networks.
- Protect and enhance open space, historic and cultural resources.
- Steward and conserve natural resources by incorporating policies and measures that enhance environmental sustainability. These will include steps such as best practices for reducing stormwater runoff; improving groundwater and stream quality; creating buffer areas; protecting steep slopes and green space; providing for non-motorized transportation; minimizing impervious surfaces such as parking lots; reducing night-sky light pollution and urban heat island effect; and improving air quality.
- Require appropriate buffers and transitions between uses of greatly different intensity.
- Be aware of the impact that surrounding municipalities have on each community, particularly shared border streets, and regulate land use accordingly.
- Reduce property maintenance problems and spur reinvestment in the existing building stock.
- Encourage future development in the proposed Harrison Point and the pad-ready Harrison Township Business Park, and redevelopment of Heights Plaza. Encourage infill development throughout the communities and particularly in the traditional commercial areas near the Allegheny River.
- Facilitate administration and enforcement of the municipalities' regulations, particularly code enforcement and rental regulation.

Future Land Use Planning

Tarentum and Brackenridge are traditional riverfront communities that are largely built out. Harrison Township has some remaining undeveloped space, but it, too, has seen development on most parcels that would not pose significant construction challenges. The focus of this plan regarding future land uses has been on targeted areas of redevelopment and reinvestment, as explained in the Social Entrepreneurship, Community and Economic Development chapter. Otherwise, the plan has focused on enhancing existing development and improving quality of life in other ways.

A major influence on any future revisions of zoning regulations is the future land use component of this implementable comprehensive plan. Each community's zoning ordinance should be consistent with the land use vision of the plan. Consequently, the future land use priorities presented herein combine and depict the communities' vision for upholding quality neighborhoods and businesses while specifically supporting redevelopment and reinvestment in targeted areas, such as the traditional commercial areas near the Allegheny River and privately owned industrial or commercial development sites.

Future land use priorities

Overall, the general land use patterns that currently exist will be maintained. Residential neighborhoods will remain intact, existing commercial areas will be strengthened, and industrial areas will continue in place.

Redevelopment and reinvestment strategies presented in previous portions of the comprehensive plan highlight the major proposed changes:

- In all three communities, the future vision includes a new emphasis on blight remediation and infill development in the traditional commercial areas. Some specific use definitions should change to consider new and innovative uses or mixed uses.
- The vision extends through all three communities a "Conservancy" use that is intended to protect existing residential areas, green space, steep slopes and buffers. This land use is consistent with elements of the plan focusing on collaborative planning for trails, parks and recreation and property maintenance.
- Encourage new uses for vacant lots, either residential development or alternative uses such as community gardens.

Land Use Category

- Residential
- Commercial and Services
- Industrial
- Infrastructure
- Recreation, Cemeteries, Open Space
- Agriculture
- Undeveloped
- Mixed Use (Harrison Point)

- Project Community Boundary
- Building Footprint
- Area Municipalities
- State Road
- County/Local Road

Revitalize, Activate Traditional Mixed-Use Downtowns (p. 29, 32)

1. Brackenridge Ave.
2. 7th Ave, West Tarentum

Connect Communities to the Allegheny Riverfront (p. 21, 57)

Strengthen Commercial Areas (p. 32, 34)

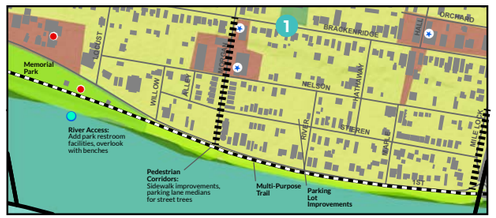
3. Freeport Road
4. River Road, Natrona
5. Create a vision plan for Heights Plaza

Protect Steep Slopes (p. 49)

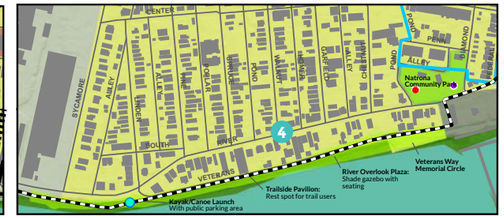
Potential Future Development

6. Harrison Point: Mixed Use
7. Country Club Site: Conservation Residential
8. Alter Road Site: Commercial
9. Vacant Industrial Space: Adaptive Reuse
10. Recreation Site, West Tarentum
11. Tarentum Riverfront Commercial

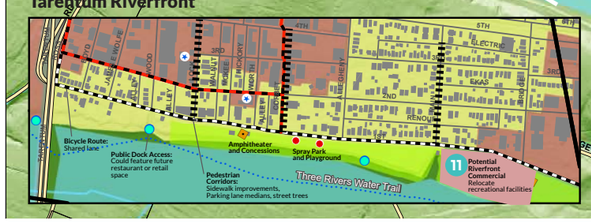
Brackenridge Riverfront



Natrona Riverfront



Tarentum Riverfront



Existing Amenities

- Historic Building
- Penn Salt Historic District
- Parks
- River Access
- Fitness Facility
- Activity Center
- Play Area
- Public Agency
- Lock and Dam

Trail Network

- Rachel Carson Trail
- Regional Hiking Trail
- Regional Water Trail
- Harrison Hills Park Trail

Three Rivers Heritage Trail

- Designated On-Road Route
- Designated Off-Road Route
- Proposed On-Road Route
- Allegheny Valley North Route

FUTURE LAND USE AND IMPROVEMENTS

HARRISON-BRACKENRIDGE-TARENTUM

Implementable Comprehensive Plan

0 750 1,500 Feet

1 in = 0.2 miles

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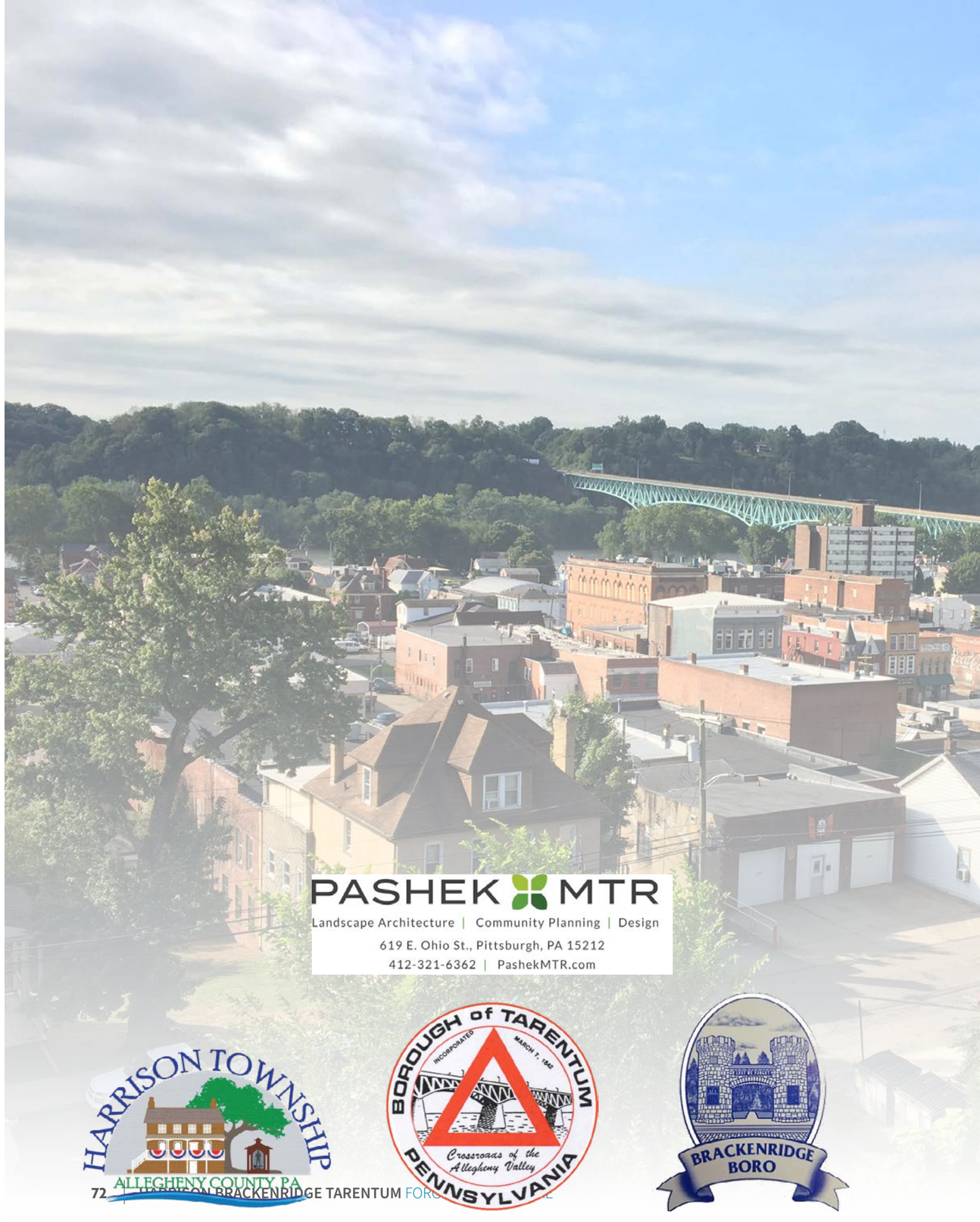

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HARRISON TOWNSHIP
ALLEGHENY COUNTY PA

BOROUGH of TARENTUM
INCORPORATED MARCH 7, 1842
Crossroads of the Allegheny Valley
PENNSYLVANIA

BRACKENRIDGE BORO