

2010



EAST LIBERTY COMMUNITY PLAN

Many Voices Driving Neighborhood Change

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pg. 3

Executive Summary

Pg. 5

Introduction

Pg. 6

Historical Background

Pg. 9

Planning Studies

Pg. 13

Development Map

Pg. 14

Green Vision

Pg. 15

Community Profile

Pg. 19

Community Planning Process

Pg. 21

Task Force Recommendations

22

Safe Neighborhoods

24

Housing

26

Workforce

28

Commercial Core

30

Small Business

32

Parks & Recreation

34

Youth Engagement

36

Healthy Community Members

Pg. 38

Physical Implementation Strategies

Pg. 45

Community Empowerment

Pg. 48

Endnote: A Vision for the Future



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our first community plan, *A Vision for East Liberty*, produced in 1999, helped guide our neighborhood's recovery from the scars left by well-intentioned but ultimately destructive urban renewal efforts. The plan's clear establishment of priorities allowed us to leverage significant financial resources and institutional support. Dramatic physical, social, and economic changes have occurred in East Liberty as a result.

Recognizing the success that followed the 1999 plan, we decided to come together again to include more neighbors and expand and refine our vision. Through a process of community meetings, a broad range of stakeholders—people who live, work, shop, play, worship, and invest in East Liberty—shared our love for the neighborhood, our concerns, and our dreams for its future.

THEMES

The clear themes that emerged from these meetings will guide residents, developers, organizers, and stakeholders through the ever-evolving process of planning and development toward our community's goals:

Sustainability

Ensure change is economically viable, benefits community members equitably, and protects our environment.

Collaboration

Address community-wide and regional issues comprehensively with a coordinated vision and strategy.

Information Sharing

Improve neighborhood-wide awareness of programs and services, events, and development plans.

Image and Identity

Encourage a positive perception of East Liberty and pride among community members by improving the look and feel of the neighborhood and celebrating our history and culture.

ACTION STEPS

Working in eight task forces, community members outlined solutions to the problems facing East Liberty and called for the following primary action steps:

Neighborhood Stabilization

Continue a comprehensive housing strategy that reweaves neighborhood fabric through a variety of mixed-income alternatives to provide housing for all.

Commercial Core Revitalization

Reinforce East Liberty's commercial heart as a unique "Town in a City" that serves both nearby residents and regional markets by providing a mix of national and local products, services and entertainment.

Connectivity

Improve transportation infrastructure and connectivity to drive development. Priorities include: pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, bicycling amenities, street grid reconnections, intuitive parking, transit-oriented development, and Penn Circle two-way conversion.

Greening

Prioritize green projects and sustainability in every neighborhood development.

Workforce

Unify workforce development initiatives into one comprehensive strategy that addresses employers' and job seekers' needs.

Youth Engagement

Engage youth in community decision-making and sharing information about healthy activities. Engage youth with jobs and career preparation. Promote collaboration among youth service providers.

Community Engagement

Improve and create comprehensive systems of collaboration and communication among service providers, neighborhood safety initiatives, small business advocates, block groups, and tenant councils.

East Liberty's 2010 community plan, like the 1999 version, is a living document to be re-examined, revised, and updated regularly. It is the core document in an ongoing series of planning and strategy documents. This plan provides a framework for actions to address specific needs, and provides a springboard from which to conduct strategic plans for specific areas of the neighborhood.

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 East Liberty Community Plan is a long-term framework for revitalization. Its purpose, building upon the 1999 East Liberty Community Plan, *A Vision for East Liberty*, is to guide the ever-evolving process of planning and development. Capturing many voices to drive neighborhood change, this plan sets our community's goals and ensures that we do not stray from our core principles.

New faces have joined the East Liberty community since the last time we created a community plan. Today, we are more diverse racially, economically, and socially. The community has made significant advancement through stakeholder collaboration, strategic planning, and market-driven development. With so much change, new stakeholders, and huge investment, it became apparent that the goals set forth in the 1999 plan were nearing completion. The community needed a revised long-term plan to include new voices and re-evaluate our strategies and priorities.

Building on the progress of the last ten years, and never forgetting where we came from, the many perspectives incorporated into this new Community Plan reflect the lessons we have learned:

- The neighborhood must ensure that our new-found market potential does not overshadow East Liberty's uniqueness.
- We must celebrate the vibrant history and spirit of the neighborhood.
- The neighborhood must grow in greener ways.

Staying true to the years of groundwork by East Liberty's long-time residents and stakeholders, this generation of the Community Plan continues to push towards an ultimate vision: a thriving, self-sustaining, healthy, unique "Town in a City" that meets the needs of everyone who lives, works, plays, worships, or shops in East Liberty.

Pg. 5



Hundreds of stakeholders, many of whom participated in the first community plan, shared their concerns, opinions and expertise.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The rise and fall of East Liberty is a familiar story in Pittsburgh. In its “golden era” in the 1940s and 1950s, East Liberty exemplified a vibrant commercial center and a tight-knit residential community. Pittsburgh’s “second downtown” declined rapidly in the 1960s after an ambitious urban renewal program designed to remake East Liberty so that it could compete with the new suburban markets and shopping malls.

Boasting movie houses, department stores, a roller skating rink, and many retail shops, East Liberty was a booming regional business district until 1958. At that time, faced with the first commercial vacancy in decades, increasing vehicular congestion, lack of parking, and competition from the suburbs, East Liberty’s business leaders began to call for change. While founded on the desire to maintain East Liberty’s strength, that change became one of the nation’s largest urban renewal projects, and ultimately brought about the demise of the once vibrant community.



Pg. 6

From Thriving Neighborhood to Failed Renewal

Attempting to mimic suburban development, these well-intentioned local and regional leaders deconstructed the tightly knit urban fabric to make way for large one-story retail buildings and wide access roads. Neighborhood streets and entire blocks of houses and commercial property were demolished and replaced by a highway-sized ring road called Penn Circle and vast parking lots around the commercial core. The central streets of the business district were converted into a pedestrian mall. More than 1,000 rental apartment units were built to anchor each end of the business district, replacing a long tradition of neighborhood home ownership. Bulldozers outpaced new construction, leaving a net loss of one million square feet of real estate.

Spanning ten years, the disruption from construction and dislocation hastened the decline in both the commercial and the residential communities. The new traffic patterns effectively took people around and away from the business district. Retail life in the heart of the community was choked off by its inaccessibility. No longer able to attract enough customers, businesses closed or moved. Entire families relocated to adjacent neighborhoods or suburbs. The new government-subsidized housing became a nuisance as it fell into disrepair over time. Most of the new suburban-style development around Penn Circle failed, leaving a moat of vacant buildings and empty expanses of cracked pavement.



Once it was apparent the project was a failure, the rest of Pittsburgh seemed to forget about the neighborhood, and East Liberty quietly survived with a few remaining local businesses and dedicated longtime residents. Community leadership was fragmented, unable to agree on a strategy to reverse the decline. While there was always the potential for recovery, failure to come together as a community made it impossible to attract private investment and public redevelopment dollars.

Revitalization’s Rocky Beginnings

In 1979, the East Liberty Quarter Chamber of Commerce formed the nonprofit East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) to facilitate redevelopment efforts in the neighborhood and begin the process of reversing the effects of urban renewal.

The organization’s first projects in the early and mid-1980s focused on improving the center of the district. ELDI worked to reopen Penn Avenue, Highland Avenue and Broad Street to vehicular traffic, and bought and redeveloped 100 Sheridan Square, which had been a residential hotel and was subsequently converted to offices. In 1987, ELDI and Urban Partners II purchased the Penn-Highland Building and restored it for office and retail use. On the same block, the restored Regent Theater was opened in 1992, then closed in 1995. The only theater remaining in East Liberty, it was reopened in the early 2000s as the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, honoring Gene Kelly and Billy

Strayhorn, two great performers from the neighborhood.

Private development came to the area in the late 1980s with development of Motor Square Garden as a boutique retail mall featuring restaurants, fashion, and high-end furniture. The project closed in the early 1990s.

By the end of the 1990s, many projects had occurred in East Liberty, but without a unifying strategy. Some succeeded; many did not. The neighborhood still languished. Statistics from the 2000 Census showed that 14.4% of the 4,121 homes in East Liberty were vacant. Residential stability was low with 81.5% renter occupancy, compared to 48% throughout Pittsburgh. The unemployment rate was 11.1%, twice the rate of the surrounding metropolitan statistical area. The neighborhood was perceived as unsafe. Many residents felt that the city had abandoned them. During this same period, racial and economic change created rifts in the neighborhood and deepened the divide between business owners and residents, between homeowners and renters, and between old and young.

East Liberty Finds Leadership and Direction

In the late 1990s, new leaders in East Liberty brought a new sense of urgency to tackling old problems. They recognized that overcoming fragmentation and division by developing an aligned neighborhood vision had to be a top priority. Through a community-driven process, stakeholders developed *A Vision for East Liberty*.

They addressed social services and public safety, business and economic development, housing, and physical environment and image, and they recommended actions to achieve their vision. The process of gaining consensus on the future of the neighborhood was difficult, painstaking work that spanned two years of community meetings. These neighborhood discussions identified areas of critical concern as well as the community’s existing assets and the positive progress already taking place. This is their vision:

“The participants in the planning process envision East Liberty as a Town in a City, a small-scale full-service neighborhood within the larger city of Pittsburgh. Drawing on East Liberty’s heritage and history as a vibrant cultural and commercial hub, it can become a thriving urban community that offers commerce, employment, recreation, services, good schools and diverse housing choices.”

This 1999 community plan set the stage for the next generation of revitalization. The plan highlighted community initiatives that represented the beginning of local investment and success, which became the building blocks for change. East Liberty was determined to reposition itself as a successful, self-sustaining community once again.



Reweaving East Liberty’s Residential Fabric

The 1999 community plan called for better housing options for all East Liberty residents in an effort to rebuild a stable residential community of homeowners and renters. The plan began a process to demolish the three poorly-managed high-rise apartment buildings in the neighborhood. These demolished housing units would then be replaced with nearly 400 units of higher quality mixed-income rental and affordable homeownership options. This new housing would help support an economically and culturally diverse population that would engage in the on-going improvement of the community.

A historic partnership of private developers, community stakeholders, and building tenants brought about the demolition of the Liberty Park and East Mall high-rises in 2005. Although the buildings had deteriorated, they were still home to many East Liberty residents, sometimes for generations. The demolition of these high-rises would force many long-time East Liberty residents to relocate. Realizing that relocation would bring a host of challenges to the neighborhood, these residents formed an advocacy group called the Coalition of Organized Residents of East Liberty (COR) to help address the needs of households facing relocation. COR assisted in negotiations that ensured relocated East Liberty residents the first opportunity to return to the new housing developments planned for the neighborhood. As of 2009, over 160 displaced residents have returned to the mixed-income communities of New Pennley Place, Penn Manor, Negley Neighbors, and Fairfield.

East Liberty’s residential community was also fighting a losing battle with abandoned properties and the absentee landlords who kept buying foreclosed properties. In response, the stakeholder-driven Real Estate Committee of ELDI designed a comprehensive development strategy to address the scale of blight in the neighborhood. ELDI now controls all of the abandoned properties in the community. ELDI also intervened to acquire foreclosed properties that would have sold quickly to absentee landlords.

With over 100 properties now under control, the community plan’s goals of mixed-income housing are being implemented.

City, state and private partners supported the community vision. Newly constructed and renovated homes have brought homeowners to stabilize some of East Liberty’s most blighted blocks. Abandoned properties became new Habitat for Humanity homes. Local churches created Open Hand Ministries to renovate affordable homes. Affordable and market rate rental housing replaced slumlord apartments. The Sojourner House MOMS program, located on Hays Street and Black Street, is now a national model for supportive housing for formerly homeless parenting women. Middle income families are now buying homes in the community.

These higher-priced sales have stabilized home values, which is protecting the equity of existing homeowners and encouraging newcomers to buy and renovate homes with their own sweat equity. The stable, mixed income neighborhood that the community plan envisioned is becoming a reality.

Bringing Back the Commercial Core

The effects of urban renewal were devastating to East Liberty’s business community. More than 300 local businesses were lost, leaving vacant storefronts haunted with the signs of department and drug stores, candy shops and boutiques long gone. Following the commercial core’s collapse, the neighborhood adapted with a street-



vending culture and a mixture of salons and barbershops, beauty supply and clothing stores, newsstands, rent-to-own or predatory lending chains, and one restaurant.

East Liberty saw the first spurt of major commercial redevelopment in 1999 when Home Depot opened. In 2002, Whole Foods Market came to the neighborhood as part of EastSide, developed as a partnership between ELDI and The Mosites Company, a private developer. The store’s success stimulated market interest unseen in the area for more than two decades and paved the way for additional developer and retailer investment. The EastSide developments brought major national chains Starbucks, Borders, Fed-Ex/Kinko’s, Walgreens, Trek, and more to East Liberty, and the nearby Village of EastSide development brought Staples, Trader Joe’s and Petland. Development is spreading to the former Nabisco factory in the form of Bakery Square. This commercial revitalization has brought quality goods and employment opportunities to East Liberty, and draws patrons from as far as Ohio and West Virginia.

Along with this investment by national retailers, East Liberty has also seen an influx of new locally-owned businesses. Several new restaurants, strategically clustered to create a destination dining district, offer diverse international cuisine. On South Highland Avenue, the Werner Building houses an eclectic mix of small businesses begun by young entrepreneurs. The Shadow Lounge, which set the stage for this investment when it opened as a music venue in 2000, expanded with AVA Lounge in 2007. East Liberty also now boasts a full-service, award winning recording studio; a sewing studio; architecture and design firms; and the community-oriented Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, which supports emerging artists. With the help of the Business Enterprise Program, existing and new business owners have access to resources to help them excel and take advantage of the rapidly changing marketplace. In order to be successful, East Liberty needs a strong mix of both locally owned and national businesses.

PLANNING STUDIES:
INFORMING THE VISION

The dramatic changes in East Liberty did not arise from the Community Plan alone. Other critical ingredients in its redevelopment include strong stakeholder engagement processes, the growth of ELDI as the local community development corporation, creative funders willing to take risks, and developers willing to think outside the box. Perhaps the most important ingredient, however, is what has happened before properties have been acquired or shovels have hit the ground—strategic planning. In-depth planning, market research and community engagement have happened for all major projects and for many specific zones of the neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods. The following planning and market research studies have informed the development progress of the last decade.

Planning Studies

To create the plans outlined on the following pages, professional consultants and diverse stakeholder visioning groups took general planning to a greater depth. Some studies are focused only on East Liberty, but many cross boundaries, since market forces follow corridors more closely than neighborhood borders. These plans provide the strategic framework for development.



1. East Liberty Enterprise Zone Land Use Study

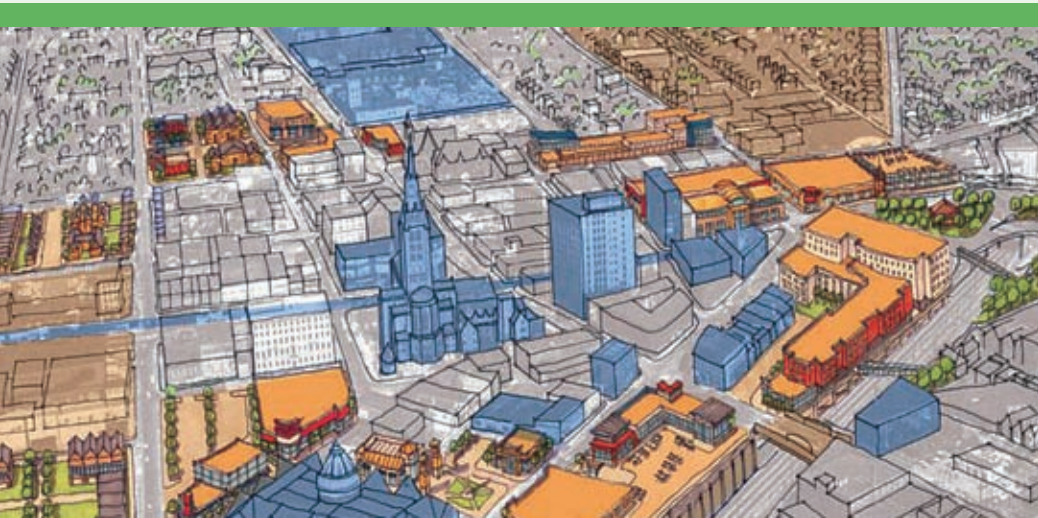
The purpose of the 1997 land use study was to show existing land use patterns in the Enterprise Zone, a portion of the commercial core. The resulting land use map was an essential tool for residents and decision makers as they developed policies for the future development of East Liberty. The study included socio-economic measures, interviews and a transportation inventory.

2. Analysis of the Market for a For-Sale Housing Initiative in East Liberty

In 1998, ELDI and The Community Builders, Inc., prepared a market analysis of the supply and demand conditions for housing within the neighborhood and evaluated the need for units for sale. It included analysis of the performance of for-sale housing units in East Liberty, residential demand at various income and age levels, and interviews with realtors.

3. A Vision for East Liberty

In 1999, East Liberty Development, Inc. completed a long community process to set the framework for revitalization of East Liberty and provide an outline for development. A Vision for East Liberty is the work of the community, defining its needs and its dreams; it gave the neighborhood’s leadership a concrete agenda and was a yardstick of accountability for East Liberty’s own organizations as well as for partner groups, city agencies and private supporters. Over the past ten years, it has guided the ongoing process of planning and development toward the community’s goals.



4. Negley Avenue Corridor

In 1999, East Liberty Development, Inc., Friendship Development Associates, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, and Highland Park Community Development Corporation worked together on a coordinated plan for Negley Avenue. Negley Avenue is a primary corridor in Pittsburgh’s East End. It connects neighborhoods and commercial centers, is a major transportation thoroughfare, and provides access to Highland Park and the Pittsburgh Zoo. Unfortunately, Negley Avenue has often been more of a barrier than a connector, with no community taking ownership of the corridor. This plan viewed Negley Avenue as a common thread weaving together the neighborhoods of East Liberty, Friendship, Garfield, and Highland Park.

5. ZHA Market Study

This economic revitalization study, completed in 1999 by the consulting firm ZHA, addressed the following questions: What is East Liberty’s current competitive position in the retail market? How will the addition of Home Depot alter this competitive position? What opportunities for retail development and revitalization currently exist or will exist in the future? What strategies should the public and private sectors pursue to capitalize upon market opportunities? This study informed the development of Whole Foods and Eastside.

6. Trans Associates Plan

In 2001, the City of Pittsburgh engaged Trans Associates consultants to study the City’s and community’s goals for the

Penn Circle area. The goals included calming traffic on Penn Circle, providing attractive streetscapes, providing a safe pedestrian environment, revitalizing the retail district and making Penn Circle a business destination. This study investigated traffic, urban design, and pedestrian and parking characteristics within and along Penn Circle as part of a process to evaluate traffic pattern and street network revisions. The plan included a public involvement process.

7. Residential Acquisition Strategy

A 2000 study showed that East Liberty was plagued with 17% vacancy in its residential areas. In 2002, to combat this problem, ELDI designed a rating system that sets a development path and timeline for each vacant property based on its condition and location: stabilize damaged structures and hold with clear titles until the market improves (“mothball”), renovate and resell homes in fair condition (“flip”), “target” strategic properties requiring more investment to change the market price, or create good quality rentals to allow potential buyers to “test drive” the neighborhood. This strategy used a local foundation grant of \$250,000 and a credit line of \$750,000 to secure nearly every vacant structure in East Liberty’s residential area. By assembling and controlling properties at scale, development strategies have had far greater impact while mitigating the negative impacts associated with vacancy.

8. Street-Works Presentation and Market Plan

In 2003, building on previous studies with additional research, Street-Works consultants identified a new development strategy for East Liberty that leveraged its market strength and showed how urban-style retail could succeed in East Liberty. Additional work was done in 2007 to reflect ongoing real estate development, which encouraged a “two-sided” retailing strategy (stores on both sides of the street) for Centre Avenue.

9. Design Guidelines

These development design guidelines, completed in 2004, articulate design goals for the corridors, districts, and neighborhoods in East Liberty, with the intention of spurring thoughtful development in the community. The guidelines facilitate the review process for new developments and encourage developers to consider opportunities that reflect community goals and expectations. Similarly, government agencies referring to the design guidelines can respond to development opportunities with confidence and clarity.



10. Housing Market Analysis for North Euclid, North St. Clair and Hays Streets

This 2004 study analyzed the marketability of 68 new or renovated homes in the northwest quadrant of East Liberty.

11. Pedestrian Bridge Design

In 2004, with funding from the Heinz Endowments, the neighborhood engaged in a community-driven process to develop an innovative and artistic design for the pedestrian bridge being proposed to connect the Eastside parking lot to Ellsworth Avenue. This project is part of a larger development strategy to restore the commercial and residential market in East Liberty.

12. Town Square Plan

The blocks around the historic East Liberty Presbyterian Church at the intersection of Highland Avenue and Penn Avenue were isolated and unengaged for many years. In 2005, ELDI began a community process to think about transforming this area into a true “town square.” This idea grew from the community’s “Town in a City” vision: to turn this special place in the heart of East Liberty, with its stunning architecture, into the public realm it naturally should be, a European-inspired plaza or piazza that allows special moments of social interaction to occur.



13. Bakery Row Plan

In 2006, more than 200 residents, business owners, developers and other stakeholders met to discuss the future of the stretch of Penn Avenue between Penn Circle East (the edge of East Liberty’s commercial core) and Fifth Avenue (between Larimer, Point Breeze, and Shadyside) that has been designated “Bakery Row.” Bakery Row includes Bakery Square—Walnut Capital’s effort to convert the former Nabisco factory into a retail, hotel and office development—and the surrounding land uses. The Bakery Row planning process was an effort to bring about a stakeholder-based shared vision for this area.

14. Penn Avenue Corridor

Penn Avenue is one of Pittsburgh’s primary arteries connecting many of the city’s neighborhoods, and it also supports substantial commercial, institutional, and residential activity. It can be argued that Penn Avenue is Pittsburgh’s “Main Street.” The study area, a diverse 2.25 mile stretch of Penn Avenue between 34th Street at the edge of the Strip District and Penn Circle West in East Liberty, serves as a galvanizing spine for the greater East End of Pittsburgh and physically connects six neighborhoods. In 2006, four community development corporations (CDCs) began to reframe Pittsburgh’s East End as a “super-neighborhood.” The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, East Liberty Development, Inc., Friendship Development Associates, and the Lawrenceville Corporation have undertaken a three-phase planning process that will yield a collaborative community development system and position the four CDCs to make significant and strategic market change.

15. Housing Market Analysis for New Energy Efficient Housing

In 2007, this market study analyzed the marketability of 17 new, state-of-the-art, energy-efficient homes in the East Liberty neighborhood.

16. Larimer Avenue Corridor

In 2008, following the completion of a Community Plan for the Larimer neighborhood, Larimer and East Liberty stakeholders started working together to develop a land use plan for the area surrounding Larimer Avenue, which connects the two neighborhoods. The scope of the plan was expanded in 2009 to include developing a community-based land use vision for the entire Larimer neighborhood and the adjacent area of East Liberty between Penn Avenue and Penn Circle East. The goal of this ongoing planning project is to develop recommendations for creating a sustainable neighborhood based on market opportunities within the study area.

17. EastSide Transit-Oriented Development TRID/TIF Analysis

In order to better understand the economic implications of the East Liberty redevelopment strategy, Nabru Lawener (a partnership between ELDI and the Mosites Company) retained Economics Research Associates in 2008 to conduct a comprehensive review of relevant new development initiatives, and to determine the direct fiscal impacts resulting from the proposed projects.

18. Seminary Master Plan

In 2009, the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary developed a 30 year master plan for its campus, including its connections to the surrounding neighborhood.



19. Parking Study

A comprehensive look at East Liberty’s parking capacity and future needs was completed in 2009. While parking is generally adequate to serve the neighborhood’s existing needs, the anticipated revitalization means that the parking system will undergo dramatic changes in both supply and demand in the coming years. The study outlines several possible strategies to address future parking needs.

20. East Liberty Green Vision

ELDI hired Perkins Eastman to create a green overlay plan for East Liberty. The Green Vision comprehensively inventories the environmental systems within East Liberty, recommends strategies for parks and public spaces, and creates guidelines and indicators for a sustainable neighborhood. The plan was completed in 2010.

DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTED OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS

All these planning studies would have been a waste of resources if they did not lead to actual development projects. We have done extensive planning in East Liberty – an average of two major planning projects a year – and the results are visible. We have seen the valuable impact of targeted, focused planning in the context of broader community-wide visioning. This visible impact inspires our continued planning.

This map highlights the development resulting from the first community plan and all of the planning studies listed on the previous pages.



DEVELOPMENT SINCE 1999

1. Whole Foods Market

2. Spinning Plate Lofts

3. Tana Ethiopian Cuisine

4. Navarro Design

5. Carnegie Library

6. Werner Building

7. East Side

8. 100 Sheridan Square and Penn Avenue Shops

9. Liberty Building

10. Penn Highland Building (Star Optical)

11. Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

12. Laughlin Building

13. 5801 Penn Avenue

14. Penn Manor
15. New Pennley Place

16. First Niagara Bank

17. Fairfield Apartments

18. Retail Development

19. Station Street Hot Dog and Sandwich Shop

20. Trader Joe’s

21. Village of Eastside

22. Staples

23. Bakery Square

24. Kingsley Association Community Center

25. Home Depot

26. Scattered Residential Developments

27. Sojourner House MOMS

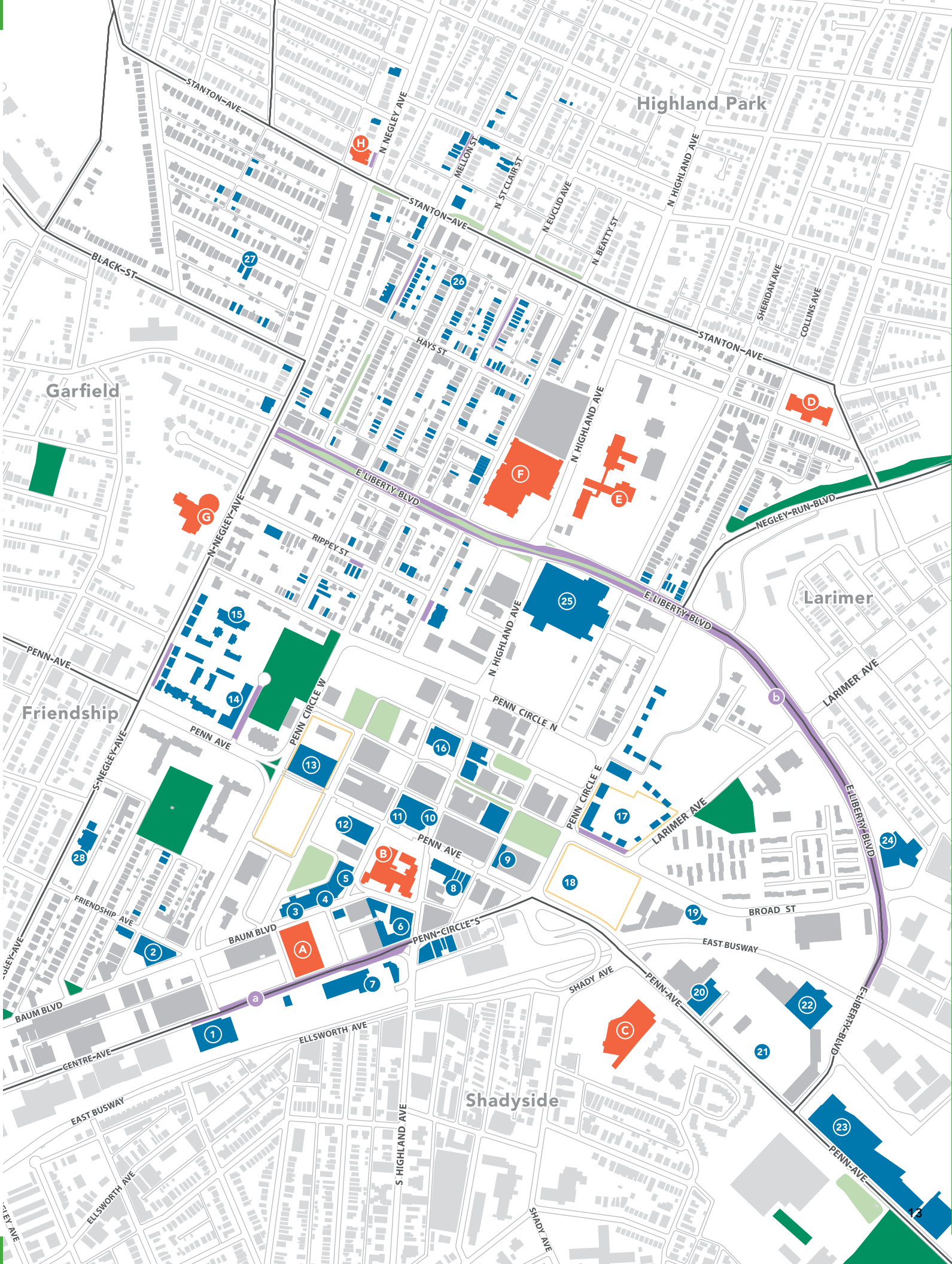
28. Friendship Academy

LANDMARKS

- A. Motor Square Garden (AAA)
- B. East Liberty Presbyterian Church
- C. Shady Hill Plaza (Giant Eagle)
- D. Dilworth School
- E. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
- F. Peabody High School
- G. Urban League Charter School
- H. Union Project

INFRASTRUCTURE

- a. One-Way to Two-Way Conversion
- b. Bicycle Lanes



GREEN VISION

How sustainable is the development taking place in East Liberty? Staff at ELDI began asking this question about five years ago. Now, there is an answer in the form of the East Liberty Green Vision – a report on current environmental conditions and a roadmap for becoming a truly green neighborhood. A team of experts and neighborhood stakeholders helped ELDI craft the nation’s first green overlay plan for a distressed urban district, defining “sustainable development” as three E’s:

- Equity – Redevelopment should create an East Liberty that welcomes and supports all stakeholders.
- Economy – Redevelopment should bring wealth and prosperity back to East Liberty.
- Environment – Redevelopment projects should improve the natural environment and serve as models for environmental stewardship.

Released in tandem with this Community Plan, the Green Vision comprehensively inventories the environmental systems within East Liberty, creates guidelines and indicators for a sustainable neighborhood, and recommends strategies for the community’s currently dysfunctional public spaces. Due to the Green Vision and ELDI’s focus on neighborhood sustainability, East Liberty is serving as a pilot site for green strategies such as

- street tree plantings and improvements to the pedestrian environment
- innovative technologies and partnerships to build super-energy-efficient housing and manage vacant space
- LEED® certified high performance green buildings
- stormwater diversion infrastructure
- remediation of vacant buildings using volunteer groups
- bike lanes and cycling amenities
- large scale transit-oriented development

Many of these strategies are now regional models as East Liberty’s efforts to be the city’s most sustainable neighborhood gain attention. East Liberty is the perfect place to pilot so many green projects – the mistakes of the past are clearly unsustainable, the sheer number of development projects to serve as platforms for experimentation is staggering, and the neighborhood group has the capacity and support from the region to continually innovate.

Funding for the Green Vision was provided by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Heinz Endowments, and the Roy A. Hunt Foundation.

Pg. 14



COMMUNITY PROFILE

This section provides an overview of the physical and social characteristics of East Liberty today, which are the context for the task force recommendations that follow. This profile also shows how far we’ve come since 1999, and how far we have yet to go to achieve our vision.

The East Liberty neighborhood has seen significant physical change and community investment over the ten years since the completion of the 1999 Community Plan. This includes residential and commercial development, as well as new community partners settling in the neighborhood. Many stakeholders wonder how these changes are actually affecting the neighborhood and shaping the face of the community. Current demographic information will not be available until after the completion of the 2010 census, but estimates from Claritas SiteReports based on recent trends show that for all of the significant development, demographic shifts have been gradual, not dramatic.

Pg. 15



Population

East Liberty has an estimated population of 6,291 as of 2008, down from its 1950 peak of nearly 15,000. East Liberty had a population of 7,973 in 1990. The neighborhood lost 1,132 residents (a 13.8% decrease) from 1990 to 2000, while the City of Pittsburgh saw a 9.5% decrease over the same ten year period. From 2000 to 2008, East Liberty lost an estimated 8.4% of its population (580 persons), about half as many as in the prior decade. Population loss has slowed down, but continues at a higher rate than in the city, which lost 7.8% of its population in the same period.

POPULATION ¹	East Liberty	Pittsburgh
Population 1990	7,973	369,785
Population 2000	6,871	334,563
Population 2008 (Estimated)	6,291	308,340
Change, 1990-2000	- 13.8%	- 9.5%
Change, 2000-2008	- 8.4%	- 7.8%

These population changes can be attributed to many factors, including an exodus of residents to suburban areas and a loss of housing units throughout the neighborhood resulting from the redevelopment of obsolete housing stock built during the 1960s and 1970s. Some subdivided homes have been restored to single-family, representing a loss of rental units. New housing developed by East Liberty Development, Inc. since 1998 has resulted in the return of many life-long residents who were displaced, and has attracted new residents to East Liberty. As additional units planned for development are built, the neighborhood should see stabilization and possible growth in population.



Demographics

East Liberty has long celebrated its diverse population. Local churches, social service organizations, and institutions take pride in their diverse racial, socio-economic, and gender and sexual preference constituencies and continue to work to build relationships within and among social and cultural groups in the community. This diversity contributes to East Liberty's success as a cultural destination, including the attraction of its ethnic restaurants and the development of its nightlife and

entertainment venues. The largest segment of the population is African American, an estimated 76% in 2008 (Claritas SiteReports), which is an increase of 3.5% from the 2000 census. Caucasians make up 16.5% of the population, which is a decrease of 5% from 2000. The community has seen slight increases in the percentage of people of Asian, Hispanic, American Indian and other races (a 1.5% increase combined).

RACE ²	2000		2008	
% African American	4980	72.5%	4781	76.0%
% Asian	147	2.1%	170	2.7%
% Other	266	3.9%	301	4.8%
% White	1478	21.5%	1039	16.5%

East Liberty has more children and fewer older residents as compared to Pittsburgh as a whole. The 2000 census showed that 19.4% of the neighborhood's total population (1,336) was under 14 years old, while 16.7% of the city's population was under 14. Additionally, 14.4% (986) of East Liberty's population was 65 or older, as compared to the city at 16.4% over 65. In other age categories, East Liberty's population more closely follows the rest of the city.

Income

East Liberty continues to have a disproportionate number of low income residents, with about 30% of the population at or below poverty in 2000 and 2008. The median income of East Liberty residents in both 2000 and 2008 is lower than the city's median income, but appears to have risen by about 30% over that time. East Liberty's household income mix also shows slight growth in the \$35,000 and above income brackets, including the largest growth in the \$100,000 to \$149,999 segment for both household and family household income categories. This may indicate that more families with middle and higher incomes are moving to the neighborhood.

INCOME & POVERTY ³	Pittsburgh 2000	East Liberty 2000	East Liberty 2008
Median Income	\$26,563	\$18,778	\$24,400
Pop. for which Poverty Calculated	313,383	6,782	6,291
Population Under Poverty	63,866	2,011	Data Not Available
Percent Under Poverty	20.4%	29.7%	

Household Income ⁴	2000	% of pop.	2008	% of pop.	% Change
Less than \$15k	1534	43.2%	1237	39.3%	-3.9%
\$15k - \$24k	637	17.9%	561	17.8%	-0.1%
\$25k - \$34k	489	13.8%	437	13.9%	0.1%
\$35k - \$49k	410	11.5%	392	12.5%	1.0%
\$50k - \$74k	276	7.8%	291	9.2%	1.4%
\$75k - \$99k	141	4.0%	129	4.1%	0.1%
\$100k - \$149k	26	0.1%	68	2.2%	2.1%
\$150k - \$499k	37	1.0%	33	1.0%	0.0%

Crime

In 1999, East Liberty had 2,238 total crimes committed, the vast majority of which were burglary, larceny, assault, drug violations, and disorderly conduct. Total crimes in 2008 were 1,204, almost half the number ten years ago, with huge reductions in the above-mentioned categories. Despite the drop, there is much work to be done to improve public safety. As can be seen from the table below, many crimes still relate to drug offenses or burglary.

Total Crimes – East Liberty ⁵		
1999	2008	% Change
2238	1204	- 46%

Selected 2008 Police Report Categories ⁶	Pittsburgh 2008	East Liberty 2008
Murder	61	1
Rape	86	5
Robbery	1,274	80
Aggravated Assault	1,214	61
Burglary	2,746	85
Auto Theft	1,410	49
Drug Offenses	2,709	80
Population (2000)	333,527	6,871

Housing

There are about 3% fewer housing units in East Liberty today than there were in 2000. Most of the eliminated units were vacant. Vacancy appears to be declining. Recent trends seem to indicate that East Liberty is moving towards a healthier balance of home ownership vs. rental, although most property in the neighborhood is still rental. Home values seem to be on the increase; houses have sold in the neighborhood for over \$300,000 in recent years, and homeowners are seeing greater resale value for their properties. The median home value has risen by almost 30%, from \$51,400 in 2000 to \$68,793 in 2008. With rising housing values, however, comes the challenge to continue providing high-quality housing options for all so that our community remains diverse and inclusive.

Housing ⁷	
Total Housing Units (2000)	4,062
Total Housing Units (2008)	3,942
Vacancy (2000)	
Occupied	3,485
Vacant	577
% Occupied	85.8%
% Vacant	14.2%
Tenure (2000)	
Occupied	3,485
Owner-Occupied	617
Renter-Occupied	2,868
% Owner-Occupied	17.7%
% Renter-Occupied	82.3%
Housing Values/Prices	
Median Value 2000	\$51,400
Median Value 2008	\$68,793
% Change in Median Value 2000-2008	33.8%



Block Groups

Throughout the years, East Liberty's neighborhood associations and block groups have been the largest stabilizing factor in the residential community. Tenant councils serve as a way for residents in larger apartment complexes to be engaged in their community. East Liberty's self-identified stakeholder groups include:

Block Groups

- Mellon's Orchard Neighborhood Association
- Negley Place Neighborhood Alliance
- Alpha Terrace Historical Society
- Mellon Street Neighbors
- South St. Clair Street Neighbors (Enright Park Neighbors)
- Enright Court
- West of the Circle Block Association
- Sheridan and Collins Neighborhood Association

Tenant Councils

- New Pennley Place & Penn Manor Tenant Council (East Liberty Tenants Coalition)
- Coalition of Organized Residents of East Liberty (COR)
- Fairfield Apartments Tenant Council
- East Liberty Garden Apartments

Community Council

A *Vision for East Liberty* recommended creation of a Community Council, a grassroots organization that would help to rebuild social connections, provide ongoing community leadership, and oversee implementation of the 1999 plan. A volunteer group of committed stakeholders met for about two years and then dissolved. Today a group of residents and block group representatives is working to reestablish a Community Council to once again build stronger connections throughout East Liberty.

Employment

East Liberty has far more jobs than it has working-age population, which means that many people from other neighborhoods come to East Liberty to work. Recent commercial development has generated 849 new jobs in East Liberty since 1999, in addition to construction jobs created by the new development. Through the Section 3 workforce initiative, a partnership between ELDI and the Coalition of Organized Residents of East Liberty (COR), many developers and businesses coming into the neighborhood have agreed to hire locally first.

Where Do My Neighbors Work? ⁸		Who Works in My Neighborhood?	
Total Employed (2000)	2,745	Total Employment (2000)	5,553

Education

Fewer than 18.5% of East Liberty residents have a bachelor’s degree or postgraduate degree, compared to 26.3% in Pittsburgh as a whole.

School reorganization and consolidation has been taking place throughout the Pittsburgh school district, and East Liberty’s schools are no exception. Because of low performance and a lack of funding throughout the district, Reizenstein Middle School was closed at the end of the 2005-06 school year. In the fall of 2008, the Reizenstein building became the site of Schenley High School, formerly in Oakland. While Schenley is among Pittsburgh Public Schools’ highest performing high schools, Peabody High School remains one of the district’s lowest performing institutions, with 57.5% of students testing below basic skill level in reading and math and a 76.8% graduation rate. Magnet-style programs in culinary arts, public safety, and robotics attract students to Peabody, but the school building is far below its capacity with only 500 students. The school has had three new principals since 2006, each of whom have engaged with local community services. “Excellence for All” symposiums bring students and parents together with

local organizations to build solid relationships with the East Liberty social service community.

Younger children in East Liberty may attend Dilworth PreK-5 magnet school, which has an arts and humanities focus, or other nearby schools such as the Urban League Charter School. Several afterschool programs including Wireless Neighborhoods’ Community LEARNS and the Parental Stress Center serve students in East Liberty.

Educational Attainment, 25 and older (2000) ⁹	East Liberty
% Less than High School	20.8%
% High School Graduate	53.7%
% Associate's Degree	7.0%
% Bachelor's Degree	9.9%
% Postgraduate Degree	8.6%

Health and Human Services

East Liberty has long had a high concentration of health and social service agencies that support the neighborhood and surrounding communities. The services that are provided in the community include literacy programs, drug and alcohol treatment centers, residential care services, and senior citizens’ services, in addition to medical and dental care providers. Service providers include Mercy Behavioral Health Center, the Salvation Army Family Crisis Center, the Center for Victims of Violent Crime, the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force, Pittsburgh Literacy Council, the East Liberty Family Health Care Center, and Family Links. The Healthy Black Families program through the University of Pittsburgh, housed at the Kingsley Association, offers free fitness education and healthy living assistance to anyone. Several community gardens around East Liberty have developed in response to, and inspired, interest in locally-grown, healthy food. East End Cooperatives Ministries, one of largest providers in the area, runs shelter programs, meals on wheels, a soup kitchen, and a food pantry, as well as a comprehensive youth development program. East Liberty is also home to the regional offices of Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program and to Vintage Senior Citizens Center.



COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

The East Liberty Community Plan is the core document in an ongoing process of strategic community planning. The process of generating a new vision for East Liberty involved more than five hundred community members in more than sixty meetings over the course of almost two years. We undertook this work because we know from experience how valuable a community plan can be.

East Liberty’s first comprehensive community plan, *A Vision for East Liberty*, was both a roadmap and an evaluation tool. Completed in 1999, it set the course for neighborhood development and guided community-driven improvements in housing, business and economic development, physical environment and image, and social services and public safety. Having a comprehensive plan allowed the community to evaluate our progress in these areas, ensure that changes were aligned with our community’s vision, and recognize our successes.

The past decade’s development has reshaped the demographics and physical appearance of the neighborhood. With new people investing in East Liberty and the majority of development projects outlined in the 1999 plan completed or in progress, there was a strong sense that it was time to update the plan and include the voices of all stakeholders.

In June 2007, approximately 180 diverse neighborhood stakeholders came together for a community meeting organized by ELDI to celebrate the accomplishments that grew from *A Vision for East Liberty* and reflect on the neighborhood’s changes in preparation for future planning. At this meeting, community members recognized that although great progress had been made, the neighborhood’s work was not done. East Liberty stakeholders were ready to participate in neighborhood planning once again.

Pg. 19





ELDI also challenged the community to consider innovative problem-solving by engaging a planning consultant, Perkins Eastman, who presented sustainable, green options to inform our thinking and planning for a healthy community. Though urban renewal severely damaged East Liberty's infrastructure, it left the neighborhood with the unique opportunity of rebuilding from the ground up in cutting-edge, sustainable ways.

Incorporating priorities identified by residents, business owners, service organizations and elected officials at this first meeting, and using the first community plan as a framework, eight planning task forces were identified:

Task Forces

- Safe Neighborhoods
- Housing
- Workforce
- Commercial Core
- Small Business
- Parks and Recreation
- Youth Engagement
- Healthy Community Members

At the second large community meeting in September 2007, ELDI staff and a facilitator from Brean Associates presented the structure for the planning process and invited community members to serve on the task forces of interest to them.

This second meeting kicked off an intensive, 10-month planning process.

From September 2007 through June 2008, task force members engaged in brainstorming and discussion to outline the problems, potential solutions, and action plans for each topic area. Each of the eight task forces met three to five times for a total of 35 task force meetings. Participants in the Coro Fellows Program in Public Affairs, a civic leadership training fellowship, supported the task forces by serving as meeting facilitators and note takers. Nearly 25 additional neighborhood meetings were held for either specific projects or conceptual planning with community stakeholders, neighborhood associations, service providers or organizations. The notes taken at the task force meetings and the many additional meetings were posted on the East Liberty Post blog (www.eastlibertypost.com) to ensure information sharing and allow feedback.

To facilitate the transition from planning to action, representatives from each of the eight task forces presented their work to the community at a third community meeting in January 2008. Using the transcribed notes from this entire process, ELDI staff worked to distill one aligned community voice from the many voices at these meetings. The distilled notes were then sent back to the task force members for review and approval.

The findings within the pages of this community plan are a compilation of the concerns, hopes, and deliberation of East Liberty stakeholders. The goal of this effort is that this community voice will drive change in East Liberty and guide the process of equitable, sustainable

redevelopment. The recommendations of the task forces, which are the heart of this community plan, begin on the next page.

Planning for East Liberty's future will not end with this document. Just as the 1999 community plan inspired a decade of engagement, collaboration, and progress, this plan should serve as a springboard for further planning to redevelop East Liberty as the unique Town in a City that we envision.

Engaging the Community in Planning

A team of trained facilitators, community development staff and highly engaged residents worked together to guide the community as a whole through the planning process. The team worked to involve a broad range of diverse stakeholders, from people who had participated in the first community plan process to people who were new to the neighborhood, reflecting East Liberty as it is today.

The community meetings and task force meetings were publicized via email, fliers distributed throughout the neighborhood, and East Liberty Post, the community's blog. Neighborhood associations were engaged to encourage participation. More than 500 stakeholders participated in the process.



TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Community members gathered in eight task forces to discuss the problems we see in the neighborhood and share our ideas for how to solve them, based on the varied perspectives and experiences of those around the table at each meeting. The solutions listed are the recommendations agreed upon by the task force participants. While not all of the solutions proposed are realistic, together they illustrate the vision we share for our neighborhood. A sign of the value of this process is that some of our recommendations are already being implemented.

Recognizing that it will take many people's efforts to make this vision a reality, the task forces did not assign responsibility for implementation of these solutions. This means that any community members or groups can take on the action steps that they have the capacity to implement.

Pg. 21





Pg. 22

SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Problems

- “Hot spots” for drugs and related crime support negative perceptions and threaten the strong fabric of the neighborhood.
- Miscommunication between residents and police creates tension and mistrust.
- Mismanaged property creates an unsafe neighborhood.
- Youth are not engaged in the workforce and in cultural activities.
- Breakdown of traditional pillars of community strength – education, families, and play spaces – threatens stability.

Potential Solutions

Drugs and Crime

- Build connections among block groups to share information and collaborate.
- Increase outreach through all partners to publicize meetings and events about safety.
- Engage small businesses to address safety concerns collaboratively through a Small Business Association and the East Liberty Quarter Chamber of Commerce.
- Create an anonymous online reporting mechanism through the community website to empower residents to have direct connections to law enforcement and neighborhood safety advocates.

Police

- Leverage existing neighborhood safety committees (Weed & Seed, Zone 5 Citizens’ Public Safety Council, etc.) to connect community groups with law enforcement at all levels.
- Increase police visibility with more foot patrols (“park and walk”) and bike patrols.
- Expose youth early and often to police through positive programming to build trust.
- Use models in nearby neighborhoods as sustainable examples of community safety initiatives.

Property Management

- Engage renters in resident councils, educating them about their rights and encouraging them to testify in housing court against problem landlords.
- Support collaboration among community groups to address problem landlords.
- Work with Allegheny County Health Department to inspect and condemn properties.
- Transfer poorly managed rental properties to responsible ownership and management.

Youth Engagement in Workforce and Culture

- Encourage workforce initiatives and connections that prioritize youth.
- Tie job programs to academic performance through schools.
- Encourage local internship and apprenticeship programs with all types of businesses.

Community Strength

- Strengthen connections between schools and the community through creative programming.
- Help local social service agencies improve service delivery by addressing their space and building needs; encourage them to collaborate in community development efforts.
- Develop safe places to play, and address problem spaces through land use planning.
- Support the ongoing development of a Community Council.

Community Update: National Night Out Brings Neighbors Together

National Night Out, held the first Tuesday in August, has become a day of community celebration and safety awareness for East Liberty. Since 2007, East Liberty residents have come together every summer for “porch parties” or barbeques in a number of locations around the neighborhood. This is an opportunity for neighbors to meet and become engaged in block groups or neighborhood associations. This annual event emphasizes community pride through fun gatherings and deters criminal activity by promoting watchful eyes on residential streets.



Pg. 24



HOUSING

Problems

- Realtors and prospective residents continue to have a poor perception of East Liberty.
- There is still not enough quality, well-managed housing in East Liberty – market rate and affordable, for-sale and rental.
- Residents are not sufficiently engaged to effectively address neighborhood-wide problems.
- Potential homeowners lack knowledge of the process of buying a home.
- Irresponsible landlords continue to allow neighborhood housing stock to degrade.
- Large property owners, including public authorities, need to be more engaged in neighborhood master planning.

Potential Solutions

Perception of the Neighborhood

- Market East Liberty as a place to live by advertising close-knit community life, amenities, organized neighbors, commuter-friendliness, diversity, and affordability. Use brochures and events to reach target markets, including people who work in East Liberty, and use multi-media to tell the stories of people who live here.
- Open a visible storefront real estate office specializing in East Liberty.
- Provide information to realtors about East Liberty, including regular updates or listings of available homes, post available homes on the community website, and reference development plans in online listings.
- Identify and encourage individual realtors who are excited about East Liberty, and allow them to advertise on East Liberty Post or elsewhere.
- Educate realtors and prospective home owners about the process of buying foreclosed properties for rehabilitation.
- Advertise green housing opportunities and market neighborhood sustainability.
- Implement temporary green strategies on vacant lots to add value to neighboring properties.

Quality, Well-Managed Housing

- Continue to build new and rehabilitated high quality housing in strategic locations to bolster neighborhood change.
- Develop both market rate and affordable rental housing.
- Continue to build partnerships to provide affordable and market rate home ownership options for a diverse neighborhood.

Engaged Residents

- Organize and mobilize residents in areas not covered by existing block groups and tie them into a larger community council.
- Continue to support existing block groups and resident councils as stakeholders in neighborhood change.

Home Ownership Resources

- Provide information to renters in East Liberty about the home buying process and resources available, publicize homeownership programs, and list available properties on East Liberty Post and in vacant storefronts.
- Offer pre-sale home inspection services.
- Provide assistance for homeowners to renovate their homes, and create a list of reputable contractors.
- Teach homeowners how to sell their homes to their best advantage.
- Make homeowners faced with predatory lending aware of refinancing options.

Landlord and Tenant Resources

- Develop a landlord association that would offer landlord training and member benefits to those who meet standards.
- Support and publicize efforts of neighborhood groups taking action against slumlords.
- Discourage slumlords by listing real estate for sale at an appropriately high price.
- Work with the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh to encourage tenants to join tenant associations; strengthen relationships with Housing Authority management.
- Educate tenants on their rights and how to take legal action against problem landlords.
- Encourage owner occupancy when multi-unit houses are sold.

Large Property Owners

- Ensure that larger property owners in the neighborhood, including the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Housing Authority, are active stakeholders in neighborhood planning.
- Work with partners to develop master plans for areas that lack them, including around the Seminary, the Larimer Avenue corridor, and around Enright Park.

Community Update: High-Performance Housing

ELDI's most recent housing developments focus on ways to build 'sustainable' housing. Dramatic fluctuations in the energy markets and rising construction costs make it imperative to create housing that addresses affordability and energy efficiency. Negley Neighbors Apartments saw the renovation of seven Victorian-era buildings into energy efficient apartments. These sturdy brick buildings will provide quality housing for generations. The Prototype Houses on Euclid Avenue took this effort to a whole new level: these homes are 40% more energy efficient than code-built homes, saving occupants \$2,000 annually in energy costs relative to other houses in the neighborhood, and are constructed with green, long-lasting products. Future phases of the prototype houses will improve on the model and will be replicated throughout the neighborhood.



Pg. 26



Problems

- There is no comprehensive strategy for workforce development in East Liberty.
- Insufficient funding creates a system that inadequately addresses workforce issues.
- Most programs are not employer driven, resulting in a disconnection between service providers and employers.
- Lack of case management results in workforce programs that do not guide employees on a career path and tend to focus on entry-level positions.

WORKFORCE

Potential Solutions

Comprehensive, Collaborative Strategy

- Form a committee with representatives from all stakeholder groups (schools, large and small employers, job training programs, youth programs, elected officials, funders, and placement agencies) to develop a shared long-term workforce strategy for the East End, incubate leadership, and clarify roles of each workforce organization.
- Create a one-stop career center, not just an employment center, for all career stages from youth to retirement. This is a long-term career advancement support system driven and funded by employers, who will benefit from centralized workforce development services to facilitate hiring and training.
- Develop and manage a comprehensive database to track clients over time to better evaluate program success.
- Develop and manage a complete list of businesses and employers.
- Develop targeted strategies for employment clusters like hospitals, construction, maintenance, etc.



Funding

- Locate a champion for Pittsburgh's workforce within the funding community.
- Secure seed funding for a collaborative process among workforce organizations.
- Collaborate on a community workforce business plan that can leverage more funding.

Employer Driven Strategies

- Structure employment services such that employers pay for consistent standards of quality and convenience.
- Support businesses' staffing needs by strengthening employer-driven services.
- Create a "welcome kit" for new businesses in the neighborhood to connect them with new workforce programs and the proposed career center.
- Placement organizations will use existing benchmarks or certification tests to ensure that potential employees are qualified for employers' needs.

Careers, Not Just Employment

- Refocus workforce programs in East Liberty and the East End on career development.
- Prioritize case management through every step of people's careers – mentoring for youth and adult job seekers.
- Create an efficient system with high standards that works for employees at every stage of their careers, from entry level to executive.

Community Update: Local Hiring

Providing local job opportunities for local residents continues to be central to revitalizing East Liberty. When Home Depot and Whole Foods Markets opened, they employed over 300 people, many local and unemployed or underemployed. Other new businesses, however, found that most of the local ready-to-work population already had jobs. After going through local hiring processes, several businesses lost half their initial workforce after only a few weeks through quitting or dismissal. Most new employees lacked basic skills. Recognizing this challenge, local stakeholders are now working together to create holistic solutions to ensure that new workforce programs are employer driven and lead East Liberty residents to careers instead of just jobs.



Pg. 28



COMMERCIAL CORE

Problems

- A negative perception continues to plague the commercial core due to unclear plans for vacant spaces, less than vibrant night life, poor maintenance, a perception of crime, loitering, unattractive sidewalks with no place to sit, unhealthy street trees and poor lighting.
- A perception of inaccessibility results from hard-to-navigate streets and transit systems and dangerous pedestrian and cycling experiences.
- Parking is limited and hard to find where needed; poorly designed parking on the perimeter of the district isolates the business core and pedestrians.
- Development pressure and deteriorating real estate threaten the historic nature of the district.

Potential Solutions

Changing the Perception

- Prioritize cleanliness and safety and coordinate marketing strategies and beautification by creating a Neighborhood Improvement District.
- Implement new streetscape plans for lighting, seating, street trees, and public art, using best management practices for a sustainable public realm.
- Employ visible safety professionals who communicate regularly and effectively with law enforcement.
- Develop plans for buildings that are detracting from the community's vitality.
- Develop ways to communicate plans for vacant buildings.
- Continue to improve processes for stakeholders to participate in master planning for the commercial district.
- Consolidate services for East Liberty's frailest residents in one location.

Increased Accessibility

- East Liberty should be Pittsburgh's most "walkable" district.
- Increase navigability with better signage and information kiosks.
- Provide comprehensive route information at bus stops.
- Continue efforts to convert Penn Circle to two-way traffic and reconnect broken traffic flow wherever possible.
- Prioritize narrowing streets over widening streets and provide for cycling accessibility wherever possible.
- Improve connections to Shadyside with Highland Avenue bridge reconstruction and completion of a pedestrian bridge from Eastside to Ellsworth Avenue.
- Investigate establishing a shuttle system for the East End.
- Redevelop the bus turnaround as a gateway entrance to the neighborhood.

New Parking Strategies

- Develop a neighborhood-wide parking plan to locate parking in the right places to serve existing and future needs.
- Create or designate employee parking behind stores, so spots in front of businesses are available for customers.
- Replace meters with central pay stations; allow longer time limits; improve enforcement; investigate validated parking for patrons of local stores.

Historic District and Character

- Establish Historic District status for the neighborhood core to promote preservation and investment.
- Support preservation as part of the Town Square planning process.
- Restore the historic Highland Building as a community asset.
- Support renovation of the Carnegie Library building and other buildings in the district.
- Emphasize the importance of many small businesses, including ethnic and minority-run businesses.
- Bring in young entrepreneurs through a small business, technology, or nonprofit incubator or "flex space," particularly in vacant buildings or spaces in transition.
- Create residential opportunities at all price points in the commercial core.
- Develop a site control strategy to address speculation.
- Ensure that consistent public realm improvements are a part of every development project.

Community Update: Penn Circle Two-Way Conversion

Penn Circle, the commercial core's major one-way ring road created during urban renewal, has caused confusion for drivers and constricted major investment in the neighborhood for more than three decades. In 2002, part of Penn Circle South was reconfigured during the construction of the EastSide development. The City of Pittsburgh is currently working with East Liberty Development, Inc. to convert the next section of Penn Circle South and Penn Circle East back to two-way traffic by 2011. The project will also revitalize the streetscape with new street trees, lighting, and sidewalk amenities. As recommended in this plan and the 1999 community plan, all of Penn Circle will eventually be reopened to two-way traffic, rebuilding lost neighborhood connectivity.



Pg. 30



SMALL BUSINESS

Problems

- The shopping district looks and feels dirty, un-maintained, vacant, inaccessible, and unsafe.
- The business district does not communicate a cohesive neighborhood identity or plans for upcoming development.
- Resources for small businesses – capital, training, and employment help – are lacking or underutilized.

Potential Solutions

A Welcoming Neighborhood

- Implement valet service, signage, free meters, and more bike racks, and promote alternative transportation to reduce parking issues.
- Work with all neighborhood stakeholders to establish a Neighborhood Improvement District, a special “clean and safe” district in East Liberty.
- Reduce and eliminate vacancy in the commercial core.
- Install new environmentally sensitive lighting, trees, public art, trash receptacles, and street furniture in the business district.
- Encourage businesses to focus on sustainability to draw customers.



Identity and Communication

- Develop an East Liberty identity or brand and promote it regionally.
- Organize cultural events, promotional billboards and information sites to improve neighborhood connectivity.
- Plan neighborhood mixers, create a community forum series, use the East Liberty Post and Bulletin newspaper, develop a mailing list, create an East Liberty column in a major newspaper, and start a press release campaign focusing on positive activity. Designate a press coordinator.

Resources for Small Businesses

- Continue to use the Small Business Enterprise Program and formalize resources into a Small Business Association to increase collaboration between businesses.
- Create a business plan competition, enticing entrepreneurs and businesses to East Liberty.
- Develop and refine ways to provide patient, low-cost capital to small businesses.
- Create an employer driven workforce training program.

Community Update: East Liberty Nightlife

The Shadow Lounge, located on Baum Boulevard in the heart of the East Liberty, represents the eclectic type of small business which helps draw visitors into the business district. Begun as a modest urban coffee shop in 2001, the Shadow Lounge and the adjoining bar and lounge, AVA, now attract a diverse crowd for local and national musical performances and events. The increased foot traffic generated by these venues has been a boon to other businesses in the district and has helped to counter the perception that East Liberty is unsafe after dark.



Pg. 32



PARKS AND RECREATION

Problems

- Existing parks are difficult to get to, not conveniently located for most residents, and unwelcoming due to fences, high speed roads, and other barriers.
- Poor design and lack of programming make parks feel unsafe.
- Bicycle safety and connectivity is poor in East Liberty.
- Lack of a comprehensive maintenance plan and limited city funding and capacity allows parks to fall into disrepair.
- Parks and open space planning seems to take a back seat to other development.

Potential Solutions

Access

- Create physical connections to existing parks (Enright, Garland, and Liberty parks and Peabody school grounds) to facilitate safe access for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Remove fences and barriers and use creative design to clearly delineate between public park space, parking areas, and roadways.
- Build bike lanes on wider streets and connect them to regional parks.
- Develop green space accessible to all residential areas without having to cross a major street.
- Develop park space north of East Liberty Boulevard.
- Use green strategies to improve neglected areas such as the medians of Negley Run Boulevard, East Liberty Boulevard, and Penn Avenue.
- Develop smaller, neighborhood-scale places to play.

Design and Programming

- Have a central information point to provide maps and information about programs and events in the parks and in the neighborhood.
- Develop signage to provide identity and a sense of place for parks and for the entire neighborhood.
- Involve police in a park safety strategy.
- Create a position for someone responsible for parks programming and planning.
- Incorporate community design processes and public art wherever possible.
- Add amenities such as workout stations and a dog park.
- Develop around parks to improve safety with more “eyes on the park.”
- Maintain vacant space as programmed green space with an education component.

Bike Safety and Connectivity

- Work closely with Bike Pittsburgh and the City to identify the best bike connections through East Liberty and promote new bike lanes.
- Incorporate bicycling in all development projects to make East Liberty the most bike friendly neighborhood in Pittsburgh.
- Involve local cycling groups and local stakeholders in bike planning.

Maintenance

- Investigate funding options for improving park maintenance and programming (Neighborhood Improvement District, foundations interested in children’s health, developers, and service providers in the community).
- Involve volunteers, community groups, the Police Athletic League, and local businesses in park maintenance.
- Engage a Parks Coordinator to facilitate volunteer cleanups.

Prioritize Parks Planning

- Create a master plan for green space in East Liberty, using the East Liberty Green Vision and other tools, and seek opportunities to incorporate green space in development projects.
- Use improved parks as market drivers for development.
- Make East Liberty parks both regional and local amenities to draw more people, improving safety and vibrancy.
- Make parks environmental assets by eliminating their water runoff and connecting them to green infrastructure planning for the neighborhood.

Community Update: East Liberty Boulevard Improvements

In 2008 and 2009, East Liberty Boulevard received a green facelift, acting as a testing site for future green improvements in East Liberty. Community meetings had determined that the four-lane boulevard, a key bicycle route and neighborhood connection, was too dangerous, so one lane in either direction was converted to parking and a bike lane. In November 2008 and March 2009, more than 250 volunteers came together to plant 165 flowering trees and shade trees on the median of East Liberty Boulevard between Negley Avenue and Collins Avenue. These improvements not only have aesthetic and environmental benefits, but also improve accessibility, making East Liberty Boulevard less of a physical and psychological barrier dividing the neighborhood.

East Liberty should be the most pedestrian friendly and bike friendly neighborhood in Pittsburgh!



Pg. 34



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Problems

- The poor performance of Pittsburgh Public Schools is the community's top concern. Local schools are default options, not schools of choice, and their very low graduation rates and attendance rates indicate serious disengagement. Students in East Liberty schools often do not live in the neighborhood, and kids who live in East Liberty often go farther away for school, making it difficult to address everyone's needs.
- Critical pieces of physical infrastructure are missing or underutilized, such as park space, recreation facilities, and school facilities. School architecture and grounds are not open or user-friendly.
- Poor collaboration and information sharing among youth-focused organizations lead to gaps in service.
- Schools and organizations do a poor job of providing holistic life education: ethics and civic responsibility, parenting resources and classes, job training, and sex education.
- Students feel disconnected from the decision-making processes and changes occurring in the neighborhood. Youth want to have a say in their community, but do not feel empowered to take action.

Potential Solutions

Schools

- Tie internship programs to academic improvement, and use existing programs in the city as models.
- Create links with a diverse range of employers in the neighborhood to expose youth to many career possibilities.
- Celebrate academic success community-wide, creating a culture of achievement.
- Invite community organizations into schools, and strengthen links and share resources among all the organizations that work with youth.
- Develop more college-based programs, in and out of school.



Photo by GTECH Strategies

Physical Infrastructure

- Redesign parks and open spaces as critical components of community development, and engage kids in that process.
- Better publicize and advertise existing facilities.
- Create safer links between amenities for youth using crosswalks, safe paths, bike lanes, etc.
- Create master plan for Peabody facilities that welcomes neighbors and community

Collaboration

- Emphasize "shoulder to shoulder" mentoring and learning experiences. Improve communication among existing mentoring programs.
- Create a very user friendly neighborhood-wide calendar of events where anyone can post information.

Holistic Life Education

- Work with existing partners to increase emphasis on career preparation, sex education, and parenting skills.

Student Empowerment

- Create a student-run information system action plan to address the fact that youth rarely know what is going on in the neighborhood.
- Create a student-run magazine or newsletter.
- Empower youth to be part of community decisionmaking.

Community Update: The 206 Project

Ideas generated by the Youth Engagement Task Force grew into The 206 Project, named for the East End zip code 15206. Driven by Wireless Neighborhoods, Community LEARNS, and Peabody High School and supported by the community, this afterschool program offers tutoring opportunities, student empowerment, and skill building. Since the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, 12 to 14 students have surveyed the community's service providers and venues, learned from experts in various fields, created a communication tool, and become leaders within Peabody for information sharing. Students in the program learn valuable skills in journalism, visual design, marketing, and community engagement.



Pg. 36



HEALTHY COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Problems

- Health services are hard to access, decentralized, and poorly advertised.
- Many East Liberty residents and stakeholders have health problems, and health and fitness are not prioritized in neighborhood planning.
- There is very little awareness of East Liberty's long history and a lack of neighborhood pride.
- Environmental health is a low priority.
- East Liberty is unsafe for pedestrians, and many people perceive East Liberty as generally unsafe.

Potential Solutions

Collaboration, Centralization, and Information

- Develop and maintain a database of health resources in or near East Liberty, building on existing lists of service providers, and make this information accessible on a website, in print, and by calling an information center. Share the list with all providers.
- Form collaborative partnerships among existing health care providers to promote their services in the neighborhood, learning from other models of collaboration.
- Centralize health services in one place to improve communication between providers and to reduce fear of stigma for using HIV, drug addiction, or mental health services.
- Create a health resource center for referrals and information about financial help for medical bills.
- Consolidate existing demographic information regarding health needs for different populations.

Prioritize Health and Fitness

- Pilot health promotion and wellness programs in East Liberty that can then spread to the whole city, including nutrition and fitness initiatives and a health information day.
- Promote community gardening and local, fresh food harvesting.
- Design public space with health in mind: sports activities, bike racks, play spaces for pets, food gardens, safe walking and jogging trails, etc.
- Connect housing property managers to health service providers (such as a university nursing program) to improve access to health care, such as free physical exams in apartment communities.
- Coordinate among churches to provide meals every night for homeless people.
- Use existing programs as a model to offer more support services and housing for homeless people.

Celebrate East Liberty History and Build Community Pride

- Create a central neighborhood history and information center to connect young people to East Liberty's history, and also to serve as a central information clearinghouse for current neighborhood activities.
- Develop mass communication methods beyond email and Internet.
- Prioritize neighborhood history and identity in all development projects.
- Market East Liberty as a destination, with signs, banners, and festive seasonal decorations in public places.
- Support neighborhood 'clean and safe' activities.

Green and Healthy Neighborhood

- Maintain and manage green spaces that aren't parks – schoolyards, new developments, and vacant lots.
- Designate land for growing food, and plan space for farmers' markets.
- Restore East Liberty's street tree canopy and develop a street tree plan.
- Encourage LEED® standards for healthy and efficient buildings in all new developments.
- Educate homeowners about small changes to green their homes.
- Help businesses and schools recycle by coordinating to reduce costs, and promote recycling neighborhood-wide – all new businesses should recycle.

Pedestrian Friendly Neighborhood and Street Safety

- Calm traffic and improve street safety with bike lanes, making crosswalks more visible, improving street lighting, and installing better signage.
- Involve the community in planning sidewalks and roads, early in the planning process.
- Provide bike safety education.
- Strengthen presence of Zone 5 beat cops, giving them broader roles in information dissemination in the neighborhood, not just patrol.
- Develop a neighborhood security service with direct communication with police, especially for after school through night time.
- Encourage and coordinate more "get to know your neighbor" events.

Community Update:

Enright Community Garden

One of East Liberty's community gardens, Enright Garden on St. Clair Street, represents how diverse stakeholders can collaborate to create a healthier neighborhood. Whole Foods Market, the Enright Park block group, and the Kentucky Avenue School worked together throughout the spring and summer of 2008 to establish a vegetable garden on what had been a vacant lot full of overgrown weeds and debris. Grow Pittsburgh, Penn State Cooperative Extension, the Student Conservation Association, and GTECH Strategies donated resources, labor, and expertise. Students sold the harvested produce at the monthly Whole Foods farmers' market, and donated the proceeds to urban gardening nonprofits. The work of these many partners allowed a negative space to become a productive and beautiful asset to neighborhood health.



PHYSICAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Thanks to the recommendations of these task forces, in addition to the many land use plans, market studies and community meetings over the last decade, East Liberty has an established vision of how our neighborhood should be improved.

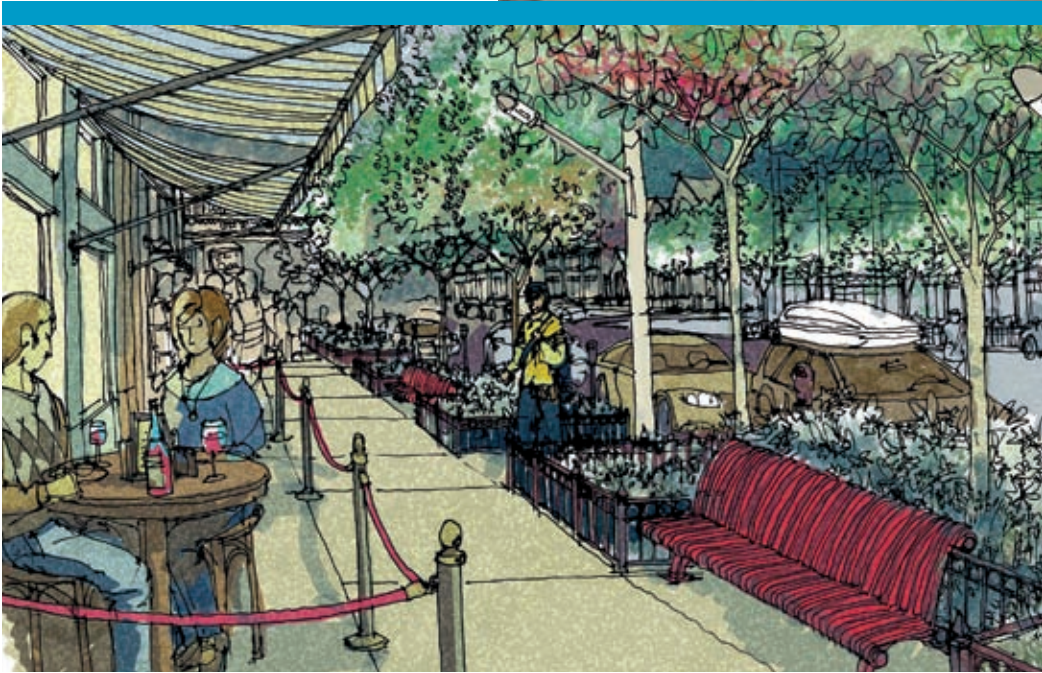
Physical development is one important aspect of neighborhood improvement. This section of the community plan is a geographic “road map” that complements stakeholders’ recommendations with clear land use and development strategies for East Liberty’s community development group, its partners, and others to use as a guide.

East Liberty is not a homogeneous neighborhood: over its history, different areas have been developed, demolished, or redeveloped in different ways. Each district has specific issues or concerns to resolve; consequently, it is prudent to develop separate revitalization strategies for different areas within East Liberty, to supplement goals for the entire neighborhood. For example, the strategies for the commercial core and residential neighborhoods focus on conservation, while the transition corridor zones focus more on rebuilding and reconnecting the physical fabric of East Liberty.

In addition to distinct zones in East Liberty, this section outlines strategies for corridors where East Liberty connects geographically to other neighborhoods, based on the understanding that markets follow corridors. Resources should be focused on strategic corridors, as they serve as catalysts for change.

The map on page 41 shows the geographic location of the different zones and corridors, each with discrete priorities and implementation strategies. Many of the physical implementation strategies defined in the next section are already in progress, while others await future execution. Although not a true land use plan, these strategies, driven by community stakeholders, serve as guidelines for future land use planning. Additional planning will be necessary to prioritize and assess the feasibility of these recommended action steps and physical interventions.

Pg. 38



Neighborhood-Wide Revitalization Goals

- Ensure that a plan exists for every part of the neighborhood – preferably a market-based land use plan completed with participation of locally organized groups.
- Eliminate vacancy or reprogram vacant space as productive space.
- Repair the broken street grid.
- Create well-designed and managed green space throughout the community.
- Provide diverse housing choices for all residents.
- Enhance the pedestrian, cycling, transit, and driving experience (in that order) through better streetscape design.
- Increase residential and/or retail density near high-traffic transit nodes (busway stops).
- Encourage public art and ensure space and funding for public art when development occurs.
- Implement sustainability principles community wide.

Commercial Core Strategies

- Eliminate first floor vacancy and activate vacant upper floors.
- Create strong gateways to the business district.
- Integrate transit as the essential backbone of the commercial core.
- Incorporate transit stops with the streetscape and design them to a high standard.
- Implement state-of-the-art best practices to improve pedestrian safety and streetscape with high environmental standards, including tree plantings, street furniture, street lighting, public art, and stormwater management strategies.
- Attract and retain businesses that appeal to both regional and local markets, including national and small businesses.
- Site “big box” retail with an urban footprint so as to anchor and grow the commercial corridor.
- Promote centralized parking pay stations throughout the business core and work with the Pittsburgh Parking Authority and Urban Redevelopment Authority to implement a plan for structured parking.

Residential Development Strategies

- Preserve and enhance East Liberty’s residential enclaves.
- Reduce irresponsible property ownership and promote responsible management guidelines for rental properties.
- Continue to purchase vacant and substandard housing and either rebuild or flip to new homeowners.
- Minimize displacement of existing residents.
- Promote home ownership opportunities.
- Empower longtime homeowners through organizing.
- Encourage strong neighborhood block watches, block parties and community spirit.
- Encourage homeowners to use home improvement assistance programs to complete home repairs.

- Develop multi-unit housing on boulevards and high-traffic arteries.
- Prioritize residential development along high visibility corridors and the edges of residential areas, reinforcing the neighborhood’s residential character.
- Discourage non-conforming uses in the residential districts.
- Work with residents to identify appropriate reuses for vacant institutional buildings.
- Restore the tree canopy through street and yard tree plantings.
- Improve alleys through engagement of residents and beautification.



Inter-neighborhood Connection Strategies

- Build strong partnerships along corridors with other communities.
- Capitalize on inter-neighborhood markets with a focus on strong edges.
- Reinforce and enhance street grids.
- Address infrastructure barriers between neighborhoods (bus-ways, warehouses, high-speed roads, topography, etc.) through creative connector projects.
- Explore and develop multi-neighborhood funding, community-wide tax increment financing, or strategic investment funds.
- Create forums for neighborhood groups to share lessons and strategies.

Economic Development Strategies

- Attract and retain employers in the commercial core.
- Balance commercial and residential uses where there is demand for both.
- Attract and expand capital to support small business creation and growth.
- Expand small business peer to peer networks and associations.
- Expand East Liberty’s restaurant district as a dining destination.



Town Square/Central Historic Core

- Implement the Town Square Plan, which includes repositioning the front lawn of East Liberty Presbyterian Church into a new plaza that functions as our Town Square.
- Explore national Historic District designation for the central business core of East Liberty to bring financing incentives for restoring older buildings.
- Complete Broad Street infrastructure improvements, including restoring two-way traffic.
- Redevelop Broad Street plaza as an active amenity that supports new development.
- Recruit and support a unique mix of small to medium-size businesses to fill vacant historic buildings within the central core.
- Attract and develop hotels to serve the growing need for hotel space in the East End.
- Redevelop the Highland Building block assemblage to connect new development on Centre Avenue to Penn Avenue.
- Develop new housing in the central core.
- Improve the Kirkwood Street public parking lot on Sheridan Avenue.
- Encourage traffic-generating retail, restaurant, and service businesses with transparent storefronts on ground floors, while locating offices and social services on upper floors.

Baum/Centre Corridor

- Convert Penn Circle South and Penn Circle East to two-way traffic.
- Build new mixed-use development on the southern edge of Centre Avenue along the busway, including structured parking, retail and office.
- Build structured parking to serve the corridor and free up parking lots for new development.
- Locate services and parking to the rear of developments with connections to Centre Avenue.
- Foster active first floor retail on both sides of Centre Avenue between Highland and Euclid with urban scale setbacks.
- Make the intersection of Centre Avenue and Highland Avenue a four-corner “place” by redeveloping the Stadterman building property at the northeast corner.
- Complete the pedestrian bridge as a pedestrian and cycling connection with Shadyside.

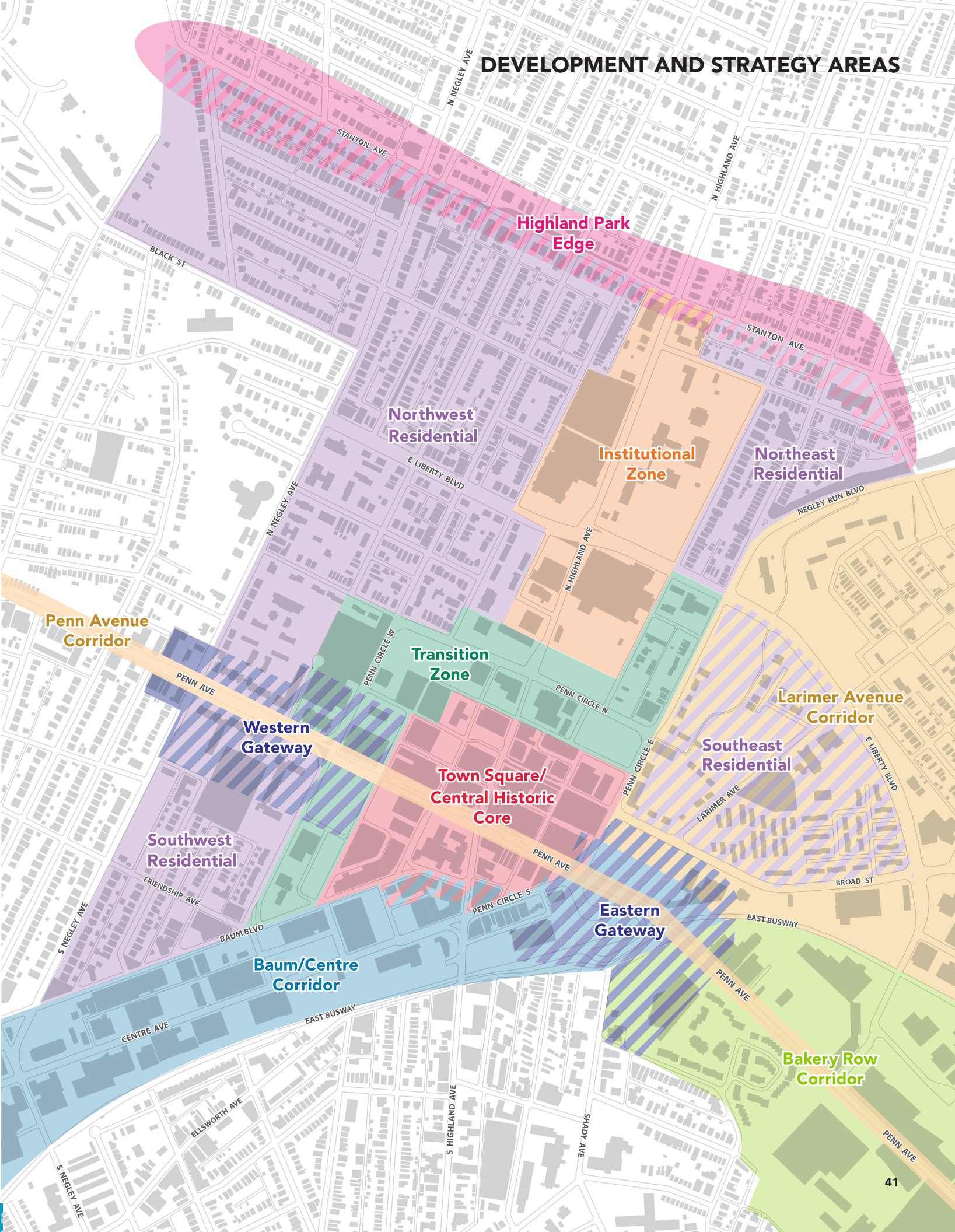
Eastern Gateway

- Develop a plan for the Shady Avenue & Penn Avenue intersection to foster development along the street edge and reposition the existing parking.
- Work with existing and new property owners to encourage community-friendly, active façades with consistent setbacks along Penn Avenue.
- Redevelop the East Liberty busway station and bus loop area to create transit-oriented development with anchor retail and parking.
- Rebuild infrastructure where Penn Avenue meets Penn Circle East to restore it to a four point intersection and create good traffic and pedestrian flow.
- Make accommodations for cycling and include bicycle parking with new infrastructure projects.
- Develop “landmark” anchor retail on the former Penn Circle high-rise site with an entrance on Penn Avenue.



Western Gateway

- Redevelop the former East Mall high-rise site as mixed use developments on both sides of Penn Avenue that include first floor retail.
- Partner with adjoining communities to build multi-story mixed-use buildings at the Penn Avenue and Negley Avenue intersection with setbacks and design that complement surrounding residential development.
- Improve pedestrian access through Penn Plaza Apartments to Enright Park from Penn Avenue and complete a stakeholder-driven land use plan and market study for Penn Plaza and Enright Park.
- Implement streetscape improvements on Penn Avenue between Negley Avenue and Penn Circle West, restoring tree canopy, street lighting, and pedestrian accessibility.
- Develop a reuse for the former Zone 5 police station in conjunction with a new master plan for Garland Park.
- Restore Penn Avenue and Penn Circle West to a traditional four-way intersection and convert Penn Circle West to two-way traffic.
- Consider connecting Enright Park to Penn Avenue to promote connectivity and park access.



Sheridan, Penn Circle North and Penn Circle West Transition Zone

- Develop a market-based land use plan for this area.
- Soften edges of the Home Depot site through outparcel development (like Vento’s) and improved streetscape.
- Restore roadway connections at Sheridan Avenue, Beatty Street, Harvard Street, and Broad Street. Ensure safe pedestrian connections across Penn Circle.
- Redevelop vacant land at the northwest corner of Penn Circle and advance housing development to rebuild residential units closer to the commercial core.
- Work with the East Liberty Citiparks Farmers’ Market to preserve the market’s presence in the neighborhood.
- Work with the Farmers’ Market Cooperative of East Liberty to preserve the market’s presence in the neighborhood and explore expansion.
- Support East End Cooperative Ministries’ plan to build a community house to provide quality long-term services for our at-risk residents, relocating their services out of the commercial core and closer to residential areas.
- Engage with Advance Auto Parts, Goodyear Auto Service, and Midas Auto Service to ensure their properties are part of a larger plan that complements the greater area.
- Ensure that pedestrian, bicycle, and transit links are part of a two-way conversion of Penn Circle North and West.
- Restore residential street scale to Penn Circle North, bringing back Rural Street, and Penn Circle West, restoring Euclid Avenue. Include on-street parking on both sides.
- Redevelop Garland Park in concert with housing development to ensure that eyes face the park and green space is actively used.



Highland Avenue Institutional Zone

- Work with Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in land use master planning to better integrate their campus with the neighborhood.
- Work with the gas station at corner of Highland Avenue and East Liberty Boulevard to better integrate it with the neighborhood.
- Assist Pittsburgh Public Schools with land use planning and redevelopment of the Peabody High School campus and the surrounding blocks, especially integrating its Beatty Street edge into the neighborhood.
- Explore improving Highland Avenue as a cycling link to

- Highland Park.
- Work with Vintage senior center to help better integrate its property into the Highland Avenue corridor.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

The “four corners” of East Liberty’s residential community include the Sheridan Avenue neighborhood to the northeast, Enright Court, East Liberty Gardens, and Fairfield to the southeast, the Enright Park area to the southwest, and the historic residential core, Mellon’s Orchard and Negley Place to the northwest.

Sheridan Avenue Area (Northeast)

The area to the east of Home Depot and the Seminary is generally in good condition, although not architecturally distinctive. Some private investment has been occurring, including converting rentals back to homeownership, and residents are starting to organize. Recently, ELDI has been able to demolish the vacant housing along East Liberty Boulevard and Collins Avenue. Linking this corner to new development via multi-unit housing will help reweave the residential fabric.

- Develop a land use plan and market study for the enclave.
- Engage the neighborhood to develop play spaces for youth.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle friendliness of East Liberty Boulevard and Negley Run Boulevard by adding crosswalks, traffic bump-outs, and improved signage and road markings.

Fairfield, Enright Court, and East Liberty Gardens (Southeast)

Residential superblocks created here during 1960s urban renewal resulted in large tracts of poorly managed, very low-income rental housing. The high-rise apartment building in this area was replaced with the successful mixed-income Fairfield Apartments in 2007. The remaining superblocks should continue to be subdivided with rebuilt streets and pedestrian connections.

- Complete the ongoing market based land use planning process for the Larimer Avenue area to include plans for new and redeveloped park space to serve the East End.
- Work with Enright Court to secure vacant and substandard rental units and convert them to owner occupied units.
- Connect Enright Court to the street grid with better infrastructure connections. Work with Enright Court to improve infrastructure and dedicate the streets to public ownership.
- Continue development of the former Liberty Park high-rise site to complete rental housing and advance the home ownership phase.
- Work with owners of East Liberty Gardens to plan for redevelopment that will include mixed income rental and for-sale ownership.
- Work towards a reuse of the former Saints Peter and Paul Church.

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle friendliness of East Liberty Boulevard by adding crosswalks, traffic bump-outs, and improved signage and road markings.

Enright Park (Southwest)

The southwestern part of East Liberty from Penn Avenue to Baum Boulevard between Penn Circle and Negley Avenue is generally a stable residential neighborhood. It has low owner-occupancy rates and is geographically isolated from the rest of East Liberty by warehouse and office uses along Baum Boulevard to the south, Penn Circle to the east, and Penn Plaza Apartments on Penn Avenue to the north. Many of the large and mid-sized houses dating from the late 1800s to 1920 have been converted to multi-unit rentals; 1960s townhouses have a mix of homeowners, Housing Authority rentals and high-end rentals. Enright Park, which includes a playground, basketball courts, and large open space areas, is a central gathering point for the community. Major strategies for this part of the community are to increase home ownership while maintaining economic diversity, to improve the green spaces, and to encourage residential renovations that are sensitive to the historic character of the buildings.

- Create a master plan for the Penn Plaza Apartments site and Enright Park, creating pedestrian connections throughout.
- Maintain the community garden as a neighborhood asset.
- Partner with the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh to improve the management and upkeep of their scattered rental units.
- Continue to strengthen the neighborhood block watch.
- Improve the green parklets on Baum Boulevard to create strong gateways to the community.
- Develop an inviting streetscape along Friendship Avenue leading to the commercial core.
- Partner with Friendship to develop a strategy for Negley Avenue.

Historic Residential Core, Mellon’s Orchard, and Negley Place (Northwest)

The northern historic part of the neighborhood is the largest residential section, starting at the business core edge and stretching north to Stanton Avenue and from Highland Ave to Chislett Street. It is a relatively cohesive part of the neighborhood that was essentially untouched by the physical changes made during the 1960s, except for East Liberty Boulevard, which splits the neighborhood by interrupting the north/south street grid. The section south of East Liberty Boulevard has suffered more from its proximity to the urban renewal transition zone, but has seen a strong movement of pioneer homeowners over the last 20 years. Built mostly as single family houses, the neighborhood also includes apartment buildings, local businesses and small neighborhood institutions. The highly visible north/south Negley Avenue corridor has a mix of large and small post-war homes, some of which have been converted into poorly maintained rental units. The neighborhood has a good building stock of mostly brick, with some areas of frame homes. Also in this zone is a small National Register Historic District, Alpha Terrace.



- Continue to renovate small apartment buildings to provide quality affordable rental housing.
- Brand and market the neighborhood.
- Create new green spaces and play spaces.
- Explore expansion of the Highland Park National Historic District to encourage preservation.
- Create a strong Negley Avenue corridor by improving rental properties.
- Work with stakeholders in Garfield to develop a plan for Black Street as a neighborhood connection corridor.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle friendliness of East Liberty Boulevard by adding crosswalks, traffic bump-outs, and improved signage and road markings.
- Calm traffic on residential streets.

INTER-NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING INITIATIVES AND CORRIDORS

Larimer Avenue Corridor

East Liberty and Larimer stakeholders are working together to complete a market study and land use plan for this area, ensuring a strong link between the East Liberty and Larimer neighborhoods.

- Complete the planning process for the former Liberty Park site to include plans for new and redeveloped park space, creating an amenity for the entire East End.
- Continue market-driven residential development.
- Implement the action steps listed above for the southeast residential area (Fairfield, Enright Court and East Liberty Gardens).
- Develop cycling connections.
- Position the corridor to capitalize on green and recreation space as an economic driver for both East Liberty and Larimer.



Bakery Row Corridor

Stakeholders in East Liberty, Shadyside, Larimer, Point Breeze and North Point Breeze have worked together to create the Bakery Row plan. This is the major gateway to East Liberty for many communities from the east.

- Work with developers of Bakery Square to create a pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly Penn Avenue and Mellon Park.
- Modifications should allow more fluid flow along the Penn Ave corridor. Introduce more pedestrian crossing points in the development to promote an experientially rich streetscape.
- Create a master plan for better integrating Shady Hill Plaza into the neighborhood.
- Promote street-front development intermixed with public open space and rear parking.
- Work with developers of the Village of East Side to continue attracting high-quality tenants.
- Commercial development should take the form of mixed-style retail with small, homegrown shops that serve neighborhood needs.
- Businesses’ hours of operation should vary to provide an active street life at all times of the day.
- Ensure that Chatham University is an engaged stakeholder in land use planning on Penn Avenue.
- Explore rear access to Bakery Square and Chatham with a through street connecting East Liberty Boulevard to Fifth Avenue.
- Encourage publicly supported new connections from Shadyside to Mellon Park and to Penn Avenue.
- Ensure that the Reizenstein School campus remains zoned for institutional, residential, or park use, not for large commercial development.



Penn Avenue Corridor

ELDI has been working with neighborhoods to the west along Penn Avenue (Friendship, Garfield, Bloomfield, and Lawrenceville) to develop comprehensive identity, streetscape, redevelopment, and mobility strategies for the Penn Avenue corridor. Penn Avenue connects East Liberty to downtown Pittsburgh, and offers diverse and complementary economic markets for East Liberty and all East End communities. Plans are for this strong collaborative partnership among community groups to promote development in the East End.

- Create signature gateways and strong intersections.
- Establish and reinforce distinct districts with unique character along the corridor.
- Preserve and enhance natural and built cultural assets; phase out inconsistent uses and forms.
- Organize the public realm and create opportunities for outdoor activity.
- Coordinate multiple modes of transportation along the corridor.
- Create an integrated parking plan specific to each district.
- Complement and align where possible with the urban design principles developed for the Penn Avenue Corridor.



Highland Park Edge

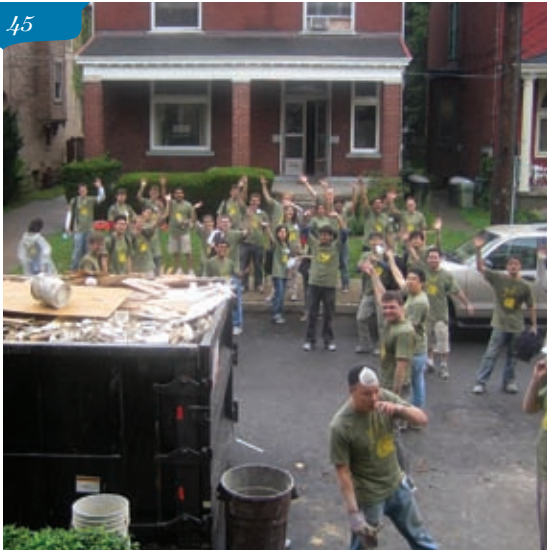
Highland Park Community Development Corporation (HPCDC) and East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) have worked together for the past ten years to achieve mutual and complementary goals including stabilizing the market in the southwestern quadrant of Highland Park. HPCDC developed a comprehensive community plan in 2004. The future of East Liberty’s historic residential enclave will build on a strong, stable market in Highland Park’s southwestern quadrant. Capitalizing on each others’ strengths, the two organizations continue to work across boundaries on a development plan. The Union Project, a community center on the border between the two neighborhoods, offers arts programs and diverse events that create space for community conversations.

- Restore the tree canopy along Stanton Ave.
- Create signature gateways and strong intersections on our neighborhood borders.
- Renovate small apartment buildings to provide high quality affordable rentals.
- Encourage use of the Neighborhood-Wide Revitalization Goals and Residential Development Strategies listed [on page 39] to guide development in the southwest quadrant of Highland Park.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT:
IN OUR HANDS

Because community planning is a fluid process by nature and new stakeholders are always coming to the table, we must encourage both new and long-time community members to take ownership of this document’s action steps and plans. East Liberty is changing daily, and for this community plan to remain relevant and truly inspire change within the neighborhood, stakeholders must frequently re-evaluate its recommendations. Residents, neighborhood associations, large and small business owners, City Council and local government officials, Zone 5 police, community organizers, social service providers, developers and spiritual community leaders should all bring their experience, expertise, appreciation for our history, and fresh ideas to the table.

Pg. 45





To facilitate this ongoing planning and re-evaluation, we must continue to use and strengthen our neighborhood associations and resident groups. Neighborhood-wide advisory committees should be made up of representatives of smaller groups of stakeholders like block groups and business associations. An example is ELDI's Real Estate Committee, which should be populated by block group representatives and other stakeholders who advise ELDI on neighborhood priorities and developing planning projects while reporting back and taking direction from their own constituencies. In this way, grassroots organizations remain engaged in transparent neighborhood problem-solving and planning, and local leaders are held accountable for informing and mobilizing specific geographical areas and groups within the community. Representative organizations, including the East Liberty Community Council, should seek to work together in a complementary way to address neighborhood needs.

Those involved in continued planning will use these guiding principles, identified by task force members, as the framework for successful initiatives:

- Sustainability – Ensure change is economically viable, benefits community members equitably, and protects our environment.
- Collaboration – Address community-wide and regional issues comprehensively with a coordinated vision and strategy.
- Information Sharing – Improve neighborhood-wide awareness of programs and services, events, and development plans.
- Image and Identity – Encourage a positive perception of East Liberty and pride among community members by improving the look and feel of the neighborhood and celebrating our history and culture.

Professional service and development organizations have been revitalizing East Liberty in accord with the 1999 Community Plan, and they and others will now use this plan as their guide. Grassroots-driven stakeholder groups should continue to set neighborhood priorities through established committees, ensuring that community voices play a role in neighborhood change. For the solutions in this community plan to become reality,

neighborhood partners must take responsibility for action steps. This community plan, in the context of our current local and national climate, offers an opportunity for real, visible community impact. Our neighborhood, our nation, and our world face challenges that require creative and inclusive solutions. We are at a crossroads in our history, and those engaged in this change will look back and tell the next generation, "We made the difference."



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those of us who have been heavily involved in producing this Community Plan would like to take the time to thank our participants, supporters and partners throughout this process. Thanks to the many East Liberty community members who shared your voices, East Liberty's neighborhood associations and resident groups, ELDI board members, our partnering community development corporations, the Coro Center for Civic Leadership and the 2008 Coro Fellows, Peabody High School, the City of Pittsburgh Mayor's Office and Department of City Planning, our state representatives, City Council members and their staffs, Zone 5 police, East Liberty's social service and faith-based communities, and the East Liberty business community.

We would like to thank the staff of our community meeting spaces at the Union Project and Kingsley Association, and offer a special thank you to the staff of East Liberty Presbyterian Church, who hosted more than 75 percent of our community meetings in their beautiful space, including community-wide meetings in their social hall. This congregation and building, a physical and symbolic center of East Liberty's core, has proven to be a community asset throughout its history.

Thanks also are due to Whole Foods Market for donating food for nearly all community meetings, providing critical sustenance for our work – with a total of 30 jars of salsa, 90 bags of chips, and approximately 4,000 cookies.

ELDI staff involved in meeting coordination, writing, and editing of this document include Emily Nordquist, Nathan Wildfire, Ernie Hogan, Skip Schwab, Maelene Myers, and Katherine Camp. Design by Imagebox Productions.



An Exemplary Community Plan Task Force Member

Throughout all of the Community Plan Task Force meetings, there was one participant who went above and beyond in her dedication to the community and this process. Alexa Belajac attended at least one meeting of every Task Force, and two or three meetings of some Task Forces. Of the roughly 35 task force meetings held throughout the process, she attended nearly 25 meetings. She was always attentive and thoughtful in her input. As a newer resident to East Liberty, she immersed herself in this process and other community events to find a better understanding of her neighborhood. Thank you, Alexa, for your dedication!



ENDNOTE

East Liberty in 2020 – A Vision for the Future

Fast forward to the year 2020 to read what East Liberty stakeholders might say when they look back at the changes in the neighborhood since 2010.

In 2007, when neighborhood partners initially undertook the task of updating the East Liberty Community Plan, many folks were skeptical of the word “sustainability.” What did sustainability mean? Was it just about green buildings and parks? East Liberty knew very well what unsustainable meant – urban flight, buildings falling apart after only 20 years, a road system that didn’t make sense, disconnections between neighbors, crime, and unemployment. Only after sustainability was defined did the term start to make sense – it was more than just “green.”

Understood as the three E’s – Social Equity, Economic Development, and Environmental Stewardship – sustainability became a hallmark of the Community Plan. Task Force members may not have been using the term “sustainability,” but they were constantly referring to a sustainable neighborhood in their recommendations and action plans. By considering every initiative and project holistically, quality of life improved for every visitor, business owner, employee and resident, and East Liberty is now a model of successful community revitalization. Together, we’ve shown how sustainable neighborhood planning can lead to community revitalization, sound economic policy, and systemic environmental change.

Neighborhood Stabilization

Twenty years ago, the housing stock in a largely vacant East Liberty was crumbling, and residents had very few housing options. When ELDI began assembling blighted properties and working with partners to create housing of choice, the residential core experienced a true revitalization. The trend that began with innovative and higher density development resulted in a boost to pedestrian street life, more eyes on the street and a sense of ownership not only for private property but for common and publicly owned spaces as well. The addition of 800 housing units – in a broad range of market rate and affordable options – within a

five-minute walk of the business district created a sense of vibrancy throughout the neighborhood. Housing choices, for long-time and new residents alike, have been greatly improved in terms of quality, variety, affordability and tenure options. The range of “life cycle” options assures that people who want to live in East Liberty throughout the various stages of their lives are able to do so. East Liberty is lauded as the city’s most diverse neighborhood, with nationally recognized supportive housing on the same blocks as \$400,000 homes. Energy efficient homes are a trademark of the leafy streets, as are the community gardens, play spaces, and rain barrels that dot the landscape.

Commercial Core

In the 1990s, our neighborhood was synonymous with blight and vacancy. Today, as a major destination for Pittsburghers and tourists alike, East Liberty is enjoying a neighborhood vibrancy that has been dormant for over two generations. The clean, tree-lined streets that greet visitors to East Liberty blend seamlessly with colorful public art in a transformed urban core. The vibrant public plazas attract the lunch crowd on sunny days and host concerts in one of the city’s safest neighborhoods.



Small businesses are thriving next to large national retailers, and keep Penn Avenue and Broad Street rooted in the neighborhood’s culture. Development that once seemed confined to one side of Centre Avenue is present everywhere within the now long-gone Penn Circle. East Liberty is the place to shop, eat, and see a show.

Connectivity

Those who remember how hard it used to be to navigate East Liberty appreciate the strategic public investments in parking structures, pedestrian-friendly amenities, and transportation connections that have made the business district easy to get



to and to get around. The two bus-way stops have not only seen a doubling of ridership over the last 10 years, but have also become hubs of activity with new transit oriented developments featuring a variety of retail, commercial, and residential mixed-use structures. These projects have nearly doubled the building density and almost tripled the number of people living within a quarter mile of each station. The neighborhood won the city’s “Most Walkable” award for the third straight year, as roads that used to serve as drag strips are now pedestrian oases amidst the hustle and bustle of the vibrant community. It seems like everyone walks and bikes for most of their shorter commutes, which means neighbors know each other more.

Public Space Drives the Neighborhood

By the late 1990s, our limited parks were some of the least safe play spaces in the neighborhood, ringed in cyclone fences and barbed wire, surrounded by high speed traffic, and dominated by pavement. Today, no child has to walk more than three blocks before finding a community play space, and our larger parks are models region-wide for their community-driven design, maintenance, and programs. Bike lanes and trail systems connect all the green space and connect to the larger regional parks. Public plazas host events and artwork, bringing young and old out into the sunshine. Homes line the streets that face every park, and most fences have been replaced with pavilions that smell like barbeque in the summer and fall. Lastly, public spaces have become

platforms for neighborhood greening, including the East End Environmental Education Center, community agriculture, and stormwater mitigation projects.

An Engaged and Upwardly Mobile Workforce

Unemployment is at its lowest levels in decades in East Liberty, thanks to the comprehensive career center. Driven by employer needs, the career center seeks to connect people to more than just jobs. Utilizing the local universities and trades groups, the center helps people grow in their careers. Workforce development programs throughout the East End now have a common vision and shared goals, and work together with the career center to address workforce issues holistically. In the last decade, while many communities were still struggling with the antiquated argument of employment versus the environment, East Liberty moved forward in capitalizing on the “green collar” job market, using environmentally responsible initiatives to create quality, living-wage jobs for local residents and small businesses.

Youth Engagement

If there is one thing that defines East Liberty, it’s our youth. Since East Liberty is such a desirable place to live, young families are moving in more and more. Peabody High School, now one of the city’s best, hosts a multitude of youth programs in partnership with local nonprofits and faith institutions. It seems as though all groups that support youth are working from the same playbook. In contrast to other neighborhoods, teenagers serve on block group

committees and are represented at the Community Council. Kids have helped design the parks, public art, and community gardens in every corner of East Liberty. Many use the career center and go on to make a big difference in the place they grew up. With the streets largely drug and gang free, children are free to learn and grow in positive ways.



Community Engagement is Key

The significant reduction in crime incidents—by more than half since 2010—proves that East Liberty is a much safer neighborhood than a decade ago. Local block groups share information at a Community Council and neighborhood pride is at an all-time high. The East Liberty Tree Tenders are one of the city’s largest and most active groups, with tree plantings almost every season. Service providers, small business advocates, and developers have all learned that collaboration is the not so secret ingredient to success.

Carrying Forward the Vision

Ten years ago, we were amazed at the work completed since 1999 as a result of the first Community Plan, but we recognized that East Liberty was not yet a sustainable neighborhood. Today, another decade has gone by, and East Liberty is once again the life-filled heart of the East End. Engaged community members have continued to work hard to plan and promote development that equitably serves all stakeholders, drives economic growth, and protects and renews the natural environment. What will the next ten years bring to East Liberty?

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