



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Allegheny Places is organized into five chapters:

Chapter 1, Developing a Vision, describes how thousands came together to develop *Allegheny Places*, a comprehensive plan for future growth, conservation and economic development in Allegheny County.

Chapter 2, Planning for Our Places, provides an overview of guiding principles and measures to promote equity and diversity, along with a summary of how the comprehensive plan was prepared and the types of places it supports.

Chapter 3, Overview of Today's Places, describes the existing character of the County through an examination of current demographics and emerging land use trends.

Chapter 4, Recommendations for Tomorrow's Places, is organized into 12 elements of the comprehensive plan, along with a compilation of equity and diversity issues. Each of the plan elements examines data collected on current conditions and trends, provides an analysis of issues and opportunities, establishes goals and objectives, and provides recommendations.

Chapter 5, Putting it in Places, outlines the steps necessary to implement the Plan. The roles and responsibilities of the key 'actors' involved in the implementation of the Plan's recommendations are identified and an action plan to get the Plan off to a quick start toward realization is described.



Photo credit: Kevin Smay





CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPING A VISION

INTRODUCTION

Allegheny Places is Allegheny County's first comprehensive plan. It establishes an overall vision for our future and a roadmap to get there. The comprehensive plan sets policies for development, redevelopment, conservation and economic initiatives. The plan provides us with a framework for the strategic use of public resources to improve the quality of life for all of our residents. *Allegheny Places* represents our commitment to a bright future.

Over the period of the plan's development, thousands came together to participate in its progress. Residents, civic and business leaders, academics and many others chose to discuss, consider and ultimately agree on a collective vision for Allegheny County's future.



Photo credit: Kevin Smay



SEEING THE FUTURE

Allegheny Places is our vision. Together, we have thought about who we are, how we have developed, where we want to be and how we intend to get there. We see a future where:



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- Transit-oriented development stimulates economic activity and relieves congestion on area roadways
- A highly efficient transportation system links Oakland, Downtown and Pittsburgh International Airport, our major economic centers
- Extensive greenways connect our communities with parks, trails, riverfronts and other natural amenities
- Good, stable, well-paying jobs are available in a diversified economy
- High quality housing choices exist for all residents at every income level

We have the means and the desire to achieve this future. But we can't do it alone. Many more people are needed to take up the cause, to take action to carry out the recommendations of this plan. You can help by getting and staying involved. Recruit others. Lead where you can; work with others where effective leadership already exists. When political will falters, strengthen it.

Let's roll up our sleeves and work together to secure a more prosperous future for our communities. *Allegheny Places* is the guide that we can rely on to get us there.

- All residents have equitable access to opportunities and benefits of our ongoing economic revitalization
- Former brownfields are transformed into attractive destinations for residents, businesses and visitors

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PLACE?

There's a lot to like about Allegheny County. We have an abundance of special places, places that are our favorite places to be. That's why 'Favorite Places' is the unifying theme of this comprehensive plan – it celebrates the established places that we value and imagines new places that build on the unique character of our County.

We used an awareness campaign that asked: "What's Your Favorite Place?" to solicit participation in the plan's development. In all, more than 3,500 of you responded to the question. There were no surprises in the most popular answers:

- South Park and North Park
- PNC Park and Heinz Field



Photo credit: McCormick Taylor

- The Waterfront
- Kennywood
- The Montour Trail

These are treasured places to be sure. But there's even more that you treasure about life in Allegheny County. You mentioned friends and family, as well as the culture and lifestyle of the area. You value the number of housing choices and their affordability, and the choices of life in the city, small town or suburb. Many of you said that you like the magnificent views and natural beauty of the area. The educational opportunities found here are attractive to people within the region and across the country. Residents and visitors alike also enjoy the major league sports teams, museums, and many other entertainment and recreational choices.

In developing *Allegheny Places*, we came together to discuss our concerns, point out opportunities and develop strategies for making Allegheny County a better place. The result is a countywide plan to help us to maintain and enhance our sense of place and provide for the creation of more special places.

What do you see in Allegheny County's future? Where do you see yourself? What's in store for your favorite place? Where will that next special place be? How can you help to preserve and enhance our treasured places? You can find the answers to these questions and more in the pages of this plan.

THE CONCEPT OF PLACES

Our favorite locations in the County have a 'sense of place'. It seems simple enough, doesn't it? But it can be difficult to define exactly what this term means. Consider this: Certain places have special meaning to particular people. Settings with a strong sense of place have an identity and character that is deeply felt and appreciated by people, whether they are local residents or visitors.

So sense of place refers to the unique, authentic, distinctive or cherished aspects of a specific setting or location.

Somewhere that lacks a sense of place may be referred to as 'placeless' or 'inauthentic'. It is generic; it is ordinary. These kinds of locations don't have a unique or authentic quality – they could be anywhere. It's also possible for unique or authentic places to lose their special qualities due to neglect, decay or the intrusion of detrimental elements.

Allegheny County has a variety of identifiable places that, together, give our region its distinctiveness. 'Places', as described in the comprehensive plan, are settings where people can live, learn, work, invest and play in the same location. These Places will provide opportunities for development and redevelopment, new investment and businesses, and support for diverse housing and employment options. Places will be a foundation for our County's ongoing economic revitalization.

A primary goal of Allegheny Places is to integrate new development into our established communities, while maintaining their character and respecting their history.

Our comprehensive plan will help to maintain and enhance our existing Places. *Allegheny Places* will also help us to create new Places. Our planning partners, including local governments and the private sector, will work together to make and strengthen Places that conserve valuable historic, cultural and natural resources, and provide abundant recreational opportunities for all to enjoy.



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THE NEED FOR A PLAN

Why do we need a comprehensive plan for the County? Furthermore, why do we need one now?

Allegheny Places represents the many distinctive places we value in our County. But, the character of these places is being threatened. Allegheny County has been changing over the years. While some of these changes were desirable, others were not.

Consider the pattern of recent growth, for instance. The County's low rate of growth has not slowed the rate of land consumption. According to Sustainable Pittsburgh's 2002 *Sustainability Indicators Report*, the amount of land developed between 1982 and 1997 increased by nearly 43% even though population declined by 8% during that time. Over the past two decades, much of the development in Allegheny County has taken the shape of suburban sprawl. Sprawl is low-density development that spreads and even 'leapfrogs' into outlying areas, which means the development randomly dots the countryside with no connection to urban infrastructure. This growth pattern separates where people live from where they shop, work, recreate and learn.

Low density sprawl is costly, inefficient and inequitable. Sprawl uses more resources than traditional city and town development.

An inefficient land use pattern can lead to higher taxes for utilities and services, an erosion of the urban core tax base, a decline in downtown commercial centers and a concentration of poverty in older urban centers.

Unlike historical forms of development in Allegheny County, the typical suburban land use pattern does not have the density to support transit use. In 1947, more than one million people – about 70% of the Allegheny County population – resided in 19 of the County's 116 municipalities. All were in or close to urban population centers accessible by trolley lines. Public transit ridership hit a peak of 280 million.

After 1950, most of the core communities experienced substantial population losses, while newer municipalities in outlying areas gained residents. Public transit ridership dropped dramatically – in 2006 it was slightly more than 70 million.

Transportation is about opportunity and equity. A good transit system provides the opportunity to access goods, services and activities. Higher income households and individuals use cars more than those lower-income groups, who have a higher dependence on public transportation. Because sprawl is moving jobs further out of our urban cores, equitable employment opportunity is not easily accessible to those who must rely on public transit.

We have many groups in Allegheny County working toward smarter growth. Some are currently cleaning up and redeveloping vacant industrial land. Brownfield reclamation is smart growth since it channels development to areas with existing utilities and access, reusing this previous investment. Similarly, rehabilitating and creatively reusing older buildings is smart growth. Mixed-use developments at densities that support public transit use are also smart growth.

Change is welcome only when the outcome is desired. *Allegheny Places* will provide us with the means to manage the changes shaping the County so that we may achieve a brighter future for all our residents.

PLANNING TO BE GREAT

Planning is a means of managing change. Perhaps if there had been more awareness of the negative effects of sprawling development we could have avoided undesirable growth in the past. Without comprehensive planning and land use regulations, communities can find themselves in a position where they are forced to accept development that

may not be in their best interests. These places don't often have the special character of the communities that we value.

Allegheny County is a wonderful place to live, work, learn and play. We plan to make it better.

Our comprehensive plan is an expression of how we see ourselves in the future. It documents the goals that we share. It reflects the interests of local communities and the wishes of our residents. *Allegheny Places* additionally provides a framework for action by establishing goals, objectives and policies to guide future growth and development.

Plans can have a strong and long-lasting influence. Pittsburgh's first Renaissance is associated with the 1950s, but actually began with a planning study in 1939, which outlined new arterial roads and called for a park at the Point. Reducing air pollution was the top priority, not just because it was a health hazard, but also because it discouraged outside investment and new business and threatened to drive established businesses out of the area. Government leaders recognized the need for a strong plan to guide them to a more desirable future.

Today, every county in Pennsylvania is required to develop a plan. The authority of counties and municipalities to plan for and control land use is provided by the *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* (MPC). The MPC defines a county comprehensive plan as:

“a land use and growth management plan...[that] establishes broad goals and criteria for municipalities to use in preparation of their comprehensive plan and land use regulation.”

We should not leave our future to chance. We can manage change to our common benefit.

The components of a comprehensive plan are similar to building blocks. A plan starts with a community vision and carries out that vision through the application of goals, policies and implementation strategies.

At the core of *Allegheny Places* is a Future Land Use Plan that provides a framework for development, redevelopment and conservation in the County. The Future Land Use Plan is a picture of what we believe Allegheny County can become if we work together.

We want to take the initiative in managing and guiding our future, not simply accept what happens. We want to guide decisions about where and how to build, so that we all may benefit. Better choices make better communities. *Allegheny Places* will provide the tools we need to make better choices.

THE NEED FOR PLANNING CONSISTENCY

Increased interest in coordinated planning at the state level – accompanied by funding assistance – helped to initiate the development of this Plan.

In 2003, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell convened a statewide conference to begin coordination among state, County and local agencies for the purpose of linking land use, transportation and economic development at all levels. The summit included 250 leaders from across the state, including Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Secretaries from the departments of transportation, economic development, natural resources and environmental protection.

Counties without plans will be at a disadvantage in the future.

The clear message of the conference was that when state agencies evaluate grant and permit applications, priority will

be given to state, County and local municipal projects that are consistent with county comprehensive plans.

The Governor's Conference resulted in the establishment of the

KEYSTONE PRINCIPLES

- Plan regionally, implement locally
- Redevelop first
- Provide efficient infrastructure
- Concentrate development
- Increase job opportunities
- Foster sustainable businesses
- Restore and enhance the environment
- Enhance recreational and heritage resources
- Expand housing opportunities
- Be fair



We were in strong agreement with these principles and were ready to develop a countywide plan consistent with them. Funding became available following the conference. Various state agencies, foundations and County agencies provided fourteen different grants totaling \$2.5 million. As the County

planning agency, the Department of Economic Development, through its Planning Division, was responsible for preparing the comprehensive plan. The County Planning Division has provided over a half a million dollars of in-kind services during development of *Allegheny Places*.

ALLEGHENY PLACES HAS WIDESPREAD SUPPORT

On March 30, 2005, Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato publicly kicked-off *Allegheny Places*. Those opening remarks led to a long, extensive public outreach initiative. *Allegheny Places* was developed through a level of public participation that was unprecedented in the County. Thousands of people shared their knowledge and vision for the County to help set us on a course for the future. Allegheny County has a wealth of talented, energetic and diverse people who were engaged at every phase of plan development.

It was important that *Allegheny Places* reflect the desires of the people of Allegheny County so that they would embrace the plan. Therefore we reached out across the County. Our public outreach sought diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, age, income and disability and in public, private and civic sector involvement. We also sought to strike a balance between the interests of the City of Pittsburgh and growing and declining urban, suburban and rural municipalities.

Three committees were assembled to provide input and guidance:

- A Steering Committee had over 100 members representing business and industry; environmental, civic, and social organizations; human service agencies and government bodies, and the Executive Directors of each of the eight Councils of Government.
- An Advisory Committee had over 40 members and included Allegheny County directors and staff, and our funding partners.
- A Sounding Board was comprised of local nonprofit, foundation, business, planning, infrastructure and governmental leaders.

Ten Resource Panels that served as technical workgroups for targeted subjects provided equally critical guidance. Hundreds of local experts served on these panels.



The participation of diverse stakeholders resulted in the creation of a technically sound plan with well-supported goals and recommendations.

A number of public outreach tools were used to involve and engage Allegheny County residents. Since the *Allegheny Places* website was launched in May 2005, there have been more than 150,000 visits to the website. Our mailing list totaled more than 2,600 people, another clear indication of the level of public interest and involvement in the Plan. Frequent communications were sent to more than 1,300 e-mail addresses in our database.

A two-part survey was conducted. One part was administered by the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development. The other part was conducted specifically as part of *Allegheny Places*. Both were similar

Photo credit: McCormick Taylor

in format and content and were intended to gauge residents' priorities for the future of Allegheny County. Specifically, the surveys covered the following subjects:

- What makes our communities desirable places in which to live
- Priorities for making Allegheny County better
- Housing preferences
- Support for municipal mergers
- Adequacy of job training

Extensive participation in the Plan's development was essential to gain support for its implementation.

Between the two parts of the survey, we received nearly 6,400 completed surveys, which provided valuable perspectives used in the development of alternative visions of the future.

Special outreach was geared toward the county's youth. The website featured a Future Faces page for students with a link to an online youth survey. In fall of 2005, an art contest was held to challenge high school students to create artwork representing their favorite places in the County. We received 95 contest submissions from the seven school districts that elected to participate, and selected winners from each grade. The website features a gallery of their work.

Through attendance at 65 community meetings, more than 3,000 people from local community and interest groups participated in Plan development. Public workshops were equally well attended. The first was held in May 2006 to present the Trend Scenario along with the four Alternative Scenarios. A second round of public workshops in November 2006 enabled us to receive public feedback on the Composite Scenario. During this round, there were seven meetings held at strategic locations throughout the County.

A final public meeting was held on July 29, 2008 to gather input on the final draft plan. The meeting was followed by a formal public comment period, followed by a public hearing on October 23, 2008. The Allegheny County Council adopted *Allegheny Places* on November 5, 2008.

Since this is the County's first comprehensive plan, there's a greater responsibility to 'get it right'. Working with county residents and stakeholders – who are often our toughest critics – to develop the plan, we are confident that we have gotten it right. Of course, an undertaking with a scope as large as *Allegheny Places* is not likely to please every citizen of the County with each specific recommendation. However, the widespread participation of citizens from all reaches of the County assures us that we have thoroughly considered the needs of residents to develop a fair and equitable plan.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

County and municipal leaders can consult *Allegheny Places* when making important decisions that could affect the quality of life in Allegheny County.

Allegheny Places is intended to guide the municipalities of the County through future changes. Half of Allegheny County's municipalities do not have current local comprehensive plans. Furthermore, since *Allegheny Places* is the County's first ever comprehensive plan, Allegheny County's 130 self-governing municipalities have never had a countywide plan as a guide for making land use decisions.

Since the County's role in planning is largely advisory, *Allegheny Places* will help the communities of Allegheny County to:

- Make important decisions concerning land use
- Set policies that will influence future development and conservation initiatives
- Ensure that decision-making is coordinated at local, County and regional levels

Allegheny Places will also enable and encourage consistency between County and municipal plans. Local municipalities will continue to be responsible for regulating land use.

Again, we would like to emphasize that State agencies are required by law to consider county comprehensive plans in evaluating local grant and permit applications and to give priority to projects that are consistent with county plans.



Log onto the web and in a couple of clicks you can have access to a vast clearinghouse of planning information specific to Allegheny County. In developing *Allegheny Places*, we compiled over 200 planning-related documents and studies into one e-library. You can access the extensive data collected from our planning partners and other agencies on www.alleghenyplaces.com, in addition to reports and mapping that we prepared for the comprehensive plan. More than 40 maps of existing conditions including transportation, utilities, community facilities, environmental conditions, etc. can be found there, along with maps for each municipality and Council of Government. There's also a database of

over 600 parks, recreation and open space facilities. The e-library even includes an extensive number of current local comprehensive plans. This information can be accessed from 'The Plan' page of the website.

Allegheny Places was developed with a vision of a prosperous future for all residents. The next chapter describes how this comprehensive plan was developed.