



**Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh**

**Presents**

**New  
Frontiers  
In  
Preservation  
2 0 0 4**

**Historic Preservation Priorities  
for the  
Southwestern Pennsylvania Region**



*Give Life to History*<sup>SM</sup>

# Acknowledgements

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YOUNG PRESERVATIONISTS ASSOCIATION<sup>SM</sup>

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and

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# Introduction

This report is about choices. The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh's "New Frontiers in Preservation" project was launched to educate individuals about the choices they have to shape the world around them. We can either allow our communities to be shaped by chance—if we do nothing—or choice, if we decide to get involved.

This report is your report. There were more than 100 people who participated in ten focus group meetings to provide input on what they believed was historically important in each of the nine counties that comprise our region: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Washington, Westmoreland, plus the City of Pittsburgh.

For the first time ever, the Pittsburgh region has a list of historic preservation priorities. You said, overwhelmingly, that Main Street revitalization—the reinvestment of public and private funds in historic commercial corridors that define this region—is a top priority.

What this report reveals is that no one is in control of our region. We do not have one regional government or a regional executive. We have hundreds of municipal governments—130 municipalities in Allegheny County alone—and dozens of county commissioners and executives, all making decisions that affect where you live, how you get to work, where you play, and whether you will appreciate and use the historic and cultural amenities in the region.

If no one person or organization is in control, that means this is your opportunity to shape your community as you see fit by providing your input into the decisions that affect your community.

In addition to voting, you can weigh in with public officials who must decide how to spend your tax dollars. Consider the following choice: should your elected and appointed officials spend your tax dollars that they collect from inner-city communities to build roads, infrastructure, and malls on pristine farmland far outside established communities? Or should they spend your money to rehabilitate existing roads, bridges, main street commercial districts, and other historic assets that are right in your back yard? Again, it's your choice.

In one sense, you have already conveyed your desires to public officials by participating in the "New Frontiers in Preservation" workshops: each county planner will get a copy of this report.

But like the parable—if a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound?—will your elected and appointed leaders listen to what you have to say? Again, that depends on you.

It is up to all of us to communicate with our elected officials, planning departments, and even the un-elected bodies that govern our region, such as the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission and Allegheny Conference on Community Development. You didn't vote for them, but they need to hear from you. You need to tell them how important historical and natural assets are in your community. You can do this by writing a letter, making a phone call, sending an e-mail, participating in public hearings, or by sending them this report.

Most importantly, the New Frontiers project reveals the need for regional cooperation among historical societies, museums, environmental organizations, and preservationists. It is imperative that all of us in the Pittsburgh area think and act regionally. This means making contact and doing business with other heritage-related organizations within the region and outside of your comfort zone. Butler County needs to communicate with Greene County and Indiana County needs to cooperate with Beaver County. Why? Because we're all in the same boat.

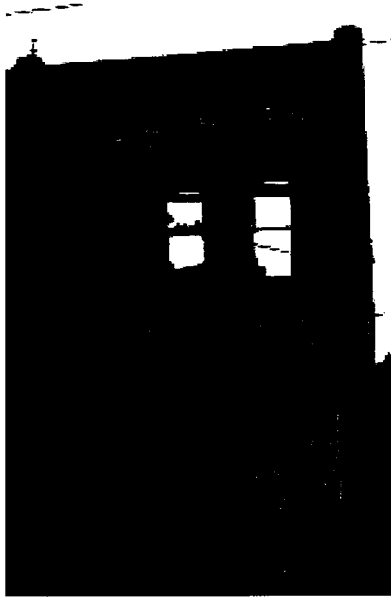


*Exercising choice: Route 65 in Emsworth.*

There's a funny joke about two people in a rowboat and one says to the other, "you're having a problem with your boat because there's a hole in the bottom and you're sinking fast." This boat—the southwestern Pennsylvania region—contains us all. We can't afford to let one community, say, Braddock, go down and expect that Homestead will magically be uplifted by the decline. We're in this together and need to work in partnership to identify and agree upon a common agenda for fortifying the region.

At a conference called "Equity & Regionalism: The Impact of Governance Restructuring on Communities of Color," sponsored by Sustainable Pittsburgh on November 19, 2004, David Miller, Associate Dean of the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs described four criteria for successful regions:

1. A fiscally-sound center;
2. Land-use policies which are guided at the regional level, including housing, education, transportation, and tax policies;
3. An anti-sprawl strategy; and
4. Regional institutions.



*Braddock is gone.*

The New Frontiers project is our opportunity as preservationists, environmentalists, decision makers, bankers, investors, homeowners, business owners, employees, and engaged citizens to ensure that we, too, will have a strong region.

Every county in southwestern Pennsylvania is in the process of preparing a Comprehensive Plan (also known as a Consolidated Plan or Master Plan). The Comprehensive Plan is a regional, county or municipal document that contains a vision of how the community will grow and change. Section III of the commonwealth enabling act for comprehensive land use plans states that all county comprehensive land use plans must address issues related to historic resources.

Citizens are encouraged to participate in the planning process. But if you choose not to participate, other people—often highly paid consultants who don't live in your community—will make the decisions for you. In other words, if you don't let your public officials know what is important, they will decide for you.

Fortunately for those who participated in the Young Preservationists' New Frontiers project, a list of important historic preservation priorities was developed for each of the nine counties, along with the City of Pittsburgh. This list will be conveyed to elected officials, planners and consultants who are preparing the Comprehensive Plan. But you should not stop there. If there is a particular site or issue that you believe should be included in your county's preservation priorities, tell your local planning official.

For the southwestern Pennsylvania region, two organizations have influence over how your tax dollars will be spent. One is called the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, or SPC, the regional planning agency that serves the Pittsburgh 10-county area (including Lawrence County). Unlike your county government, SPC officials are appointed, not elected.

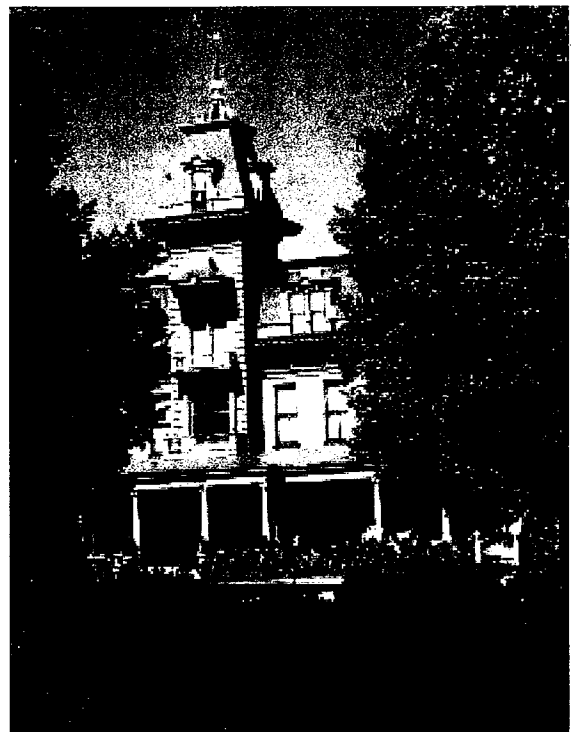
In addition, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, another un-elected board of corporate and civic leaders, also makes economic development decisions that affect the region. Regardless of whether these two bodies are not democratically elected, it is important that you weigh in with them as well. The decisions that they make directly affect your community.

For instance, members of these two bodies have been strong advocates for completion of the proposed Mon/Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway. Conversely, they may also make decisions that affect whether your community will get public transit or assistance with a Main Street project. Therefore, it is in your best interests to let them know how you feel about such projects before it's too late.

A list of planners for each county is provided in the report's appendix.

This New Frontiers report is a starting point, not the final word. That responsibility rests with you. Ultimately, the future of your community—and of our region—rests in your hands. The Young Preservationists encourage you to get involved with your community's planning process, know your planners and elected officials, and convey to them how important it is to preserve and reuse historic properties in your community. We are building a foundation for a collaborative effort among various stakeholders to ensure that the historic, cultural, and natural assets of southwestern Pennsylvania are preserved for the next generation.

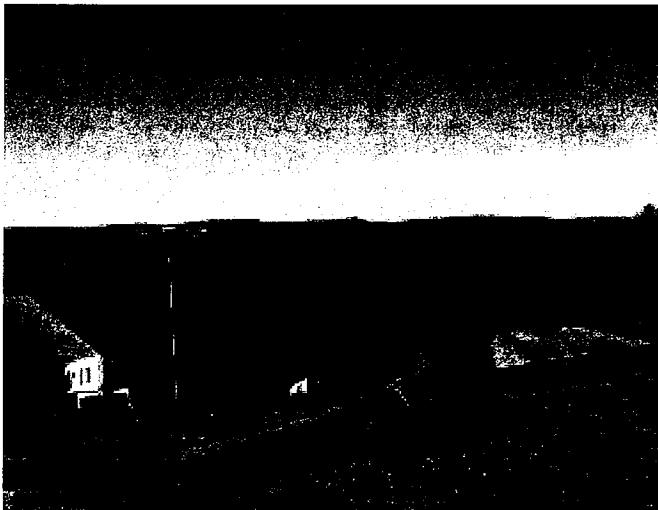
*Give life to history.<sup>SM</sup>*



*Pittsburgh's Highland Park neighborhood is healthy.*

# Executive Summary

For decades, Pennsylvanian cities, towns, and suburbs have worked hard to reverse the indicators of a declining region: deindustrialization, population exodus, job losses, and diminished vitality. But recently, efforts to grow the region out of its slump by abandoning older towns and boroughs and developing farmland and greenspace into malls and low-density housing has only exacerbated the decline. The "New Frontiers" project set out to show that historic preservation remains one of the most effective tools for growth and revitalization and should be considered as an alternative to the inconsistent growth pattern known as sprawl.



*Will Fayette County become the next victim of sprawl?*

Southwestern Pennsylvania is a hotbed of preservation opportunities. Within many of the older, established towns and boroughs lie hundreds of historical and natural resources. The Young Preservationists Association's annual "Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities" list demonstrates that there are a number of historic investment properties that could turn around communities. But a lack of consistent regional planning leaves older communities neglected and abandoned. In order to return the region to preeminence, communities need to concentrate on making the most of our unique, established places by thinking and acting strategically to identify, restore, and reuse these historic assets.

To stimulate policy planning and development around historic preservation, the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh launched the New Frontiers in Preservation initiative. Funded by a grant from the Sprout Fund and with support from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the initiative provided ten workshops in the Pittsburgh Region with three main objectives:

- 1) to raise awareness of historic preservation and its economic benefits,
- 2) to prioritize preservation opportunities in each county in the Pittsburgh Region as well as the City of Pittsburgh that can influence regional land-use plans, and
- 3) to develop an action plan for the targeted localities.

This report is a record of the project results, containing the list of the Top Ten Preservation Priorities in each county that comprises the region: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Westmoreland, and Washington counties and the City of Pittsburgh. A detailed list of preservation opportunities in southwestern Pennsylvania and action steps for each of the Top Ten Priorities are included within this report.

This report is also an analysis of the identifiable trends concerning preservation efforts, including but not limited to the revitalization of historic downtowns, brownfield redevelopment, and the preservation of green spaces. The New Frontiers in Preservation project also acknowledges trends in the development of heritage tourism and the preservation of a sense of place in southwestern Pennsylvania.

In addition, this report is a compilation of recommendations intended for community stakeholders and the public. The county commissioners, departments of planning and development, and tourism agencies will receive copies of this report, as well as county historical societies, municipal governments, educational institutions, and other agencies.

The information in this report is intended to influence comprehensive land use plans in southwestern Pennsylvania and the PHMC's Preservation Plan. Most importantly, the results of the New Frontiers in Preservation project will serve as a guide for how the region can grow *with* its history as a foundation for progress.

The YPA believes that people and places are inherently linked and that the development of historical assets of a region is essential to the lifeline of the community — to its sense of place, to the growth of its economy, and above all to the quality of its future. In the same way that human beings have shaped the present, individuals have the power to determine the future of a region.

The New Frontiers in Preservation initiative empowers community members with the opportunity to determine the future of the Pittsburgh region by preserving its past. Now more than ever, strategic plans that utilize the region's historic and natural resources are needed to revitalize Pennsylvania's towns, cities, and suburbs.

