



## **Urban Community Prototype: River City**

### **The Community:**

Located along the shores of one of Allegheny County's many rivers, River City is a community whose history was forged by heavy industry. Its economy was based on the steel industry until the 1980s, but is now home to a variety of small industrial enterprises. Settled in the mid-1700s this Pittsburgh area municipality has a total area of 4 square miles.

River City's 20,000 residents are represented in 8,000 households and 5,000 families, with a population density of 5,000 per square mile. The municipality's population dropped over 50% since the 1940s when the steel-making industry was at its most recent peak. Of the total households, 29% have children under 18 years of age, and 21% of River City's population are residents 65 years of age or older. Median household income is \$24,000 and median family income is \$32,000.

### **Recreation and Park Facilities:**

Living up to its name, River City has river access at Riverfront Park and Marina. In addition to its 150-slip marina, this park is home to a boat launch, walking trail, and some picnic areas. In the center of town is Politico Park, this parklet is the home of the only known statue of presidential candidate Pat Paulson, a River City native. River City Community Park is the city's premier park, with many attractive facilities including baseball fields, tennis courts, exercise trails, amphitheater, fishing pond, and picnic pavilions. In addition to these city parks, Allegheny County has a park that touches on the edge of the city.

While River City has a Recreation and Parks Director and a total of 10 department employees, they are primarily focused on maintaining current parks and publicly-held lands and landscaping. Most of the recreation opportunities in this community are provided by the YMCA of River City. The YMCA offers programs for health and fitness, aquatics, camping, family, community development, sports, and teens. Their facilities include an indoor/outdoor pool, gym, fitness center, free weight room, aerobics/dance studio, handball/racquetball, indoor running track, sauna/steam room, whirlpool/Jacuzzi, teen/youth center, general purpose room, and residence rooms.

River City is also fortunate to have a section of the River Rail Trail ("RRT") run through the community. This section of the RRT is complete and open to public. The RRT is part of the larger Allegheny Foothills Trail, which connects many communities in

Allegheny County to neighboring states; large portions of this regional trail are also complete and open to the public.

### **Defining and Meeting the Needs:**

River City, while financially disadvantaged, has the current benefit of large areas of land being once again available within a highly-developed community. With over 150 acres of brownfields and riverfronts left in industrial ruin, the city's park system could be expanded in such a way to provide continuous waterfront trails and recreational access to the river, along with a strategically developed system of parks, parklets, and interconnecting "green" pathways throughout the community, creating what would be a model park system in this established municipality. This type of redevelopment project would be directly in line with the Governor's Keystone Principals #2: Redevelop First and #7 Restore and Enhance the Environment and also the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' ("DCNR") Blueprint Goal: Build and Maintain Sustainable and Attractive Communities – placing this type of revitalization project high on the state's funding list.

Planning is the key to this type of approach and completion of a combination Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan and Waterfront/Urban Greenway Master Plan would be a good way for River City to begin. The Comprehensive Plan would address the city's recreation facility and park improvement and expansion needs, recreational programming and special events for the community, and provide recommendations for management, staffing, budgeting, and funding to meet the identified needs. The Waterfront/Urban Greenways Plan would propose a design for the continuous waterfront trail system and the creation of an interconnected series of green spaces within the municipality's residential and commercial areas. DCNR provides 50% funding for such planning efforts through their Planning and Technical Assistance grant programs.

Because of its community type and financial status, River City is eligible for a wide range of grants from county, state, and federal sources. A listing of available grants related to parks and recreation can be found in Appendix [ ]. A visit to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Foundation Center in Pittsburgh could yield a list of foundations whose missions align with the funding needs of River City. Partnerships with local businesses are another way to address improvements and additions to existing facilities. By offering naming rights or some other form of visible recognition in the parks, businesses can be enticed to assist with the funding of those facilities. Similarly, business sponsorships of programs and special events can help stretch programming dollars further. Consideration could be given to applying for a DCNR "Peer-to-Peer" Technical Assistance grant as a quick way to review current operating efficiencies and fee-setting policies to look for ways to reduce costs, while increasing revenues.

In an effort to obtain sports equipment for River City residents that may not financially be able to provide them for their children, the Recreation and Parks Department could explore the National Recreation and Parks Association (“NRPA”) “Programs and Partnerships” opportunities for already developed sports programming with supplied equipment and also grant funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (<http://www.newpa.com/programFinder.aspx?typeID=2>). The community could also develop a sports equipment donation program, where families or individuals could donate sports equipment they no longer need for a tax write-off; that equipment would then be distributed to interested families on the basis of economic need.

Additional resources are available from NRPA, DCNR, and the Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society (“PRPS”). NRPA offers an extensive list of publications specifically geared to the parks and recreation field, including books based on topics such as management, planning, leisure for all ages, and citizen members (<http://intershop.active.com/cgi-bin/NRPA.storefront/45036d300656924d2717ac10005d05c3/Catalog/1002>). NRPA also offers a number of recreation program models that can be used in any community (<http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=28>).

DCNR provides a substantial list of publications that include several titles that might be of interest to cities in decline: “Multi-Municipal Cooperation for Recreation and Parks”, “Financing Municipal Recreation and Parks”, and “A Guide to Funding Recreation and Conservation Projects.” (<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/publications/index.aspx>).

The Recreation and Parks Technical Assistance Program (RecTAP) is offered by PRPS. This program matches recreation and park professionals with municipalities to provide advice and assistance on specific issues that can be addressed within a limited amount of time (<http://www.prps.org/pdf/RecTAPBrochure.pdf>).

*Summary of Recommendations: Urban Community Prototype*

Priority	Goal/Policy	Implementation Strategy
1	Complete a “Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan” and a “Waterfront/Urban Greenway Master Plan”	Apply for a DCNR matching technical assistance grant to hire a consultant to assess and address all recreational program and facility needs, agency staffing, and to identify funding sources for the recommendations. This “combination” grant application should also include a Master Site Plan for a Waterfront/Urban Greenway, which would develop a proposed design for a continuous waterfront trail system and a system of interconnected green spaces within the city.
2	Develop Funding Strategy and Development Timeline	Based on the above Comprehensive Plan and Master Plan: a. Implement recommended changes to the department organizational structure; b. Develop a funding strategy employing the identified sources; and c. Prepare a phased plan of improvement work to existing recreation and park facilities and development of the waterfront trail system and urban green spaces.
3	Seek Additional Funding Sources	Explore alternative funding sources such as foundations, partnerships, sponsorships, and other non-traditional grant sources.
4	Phased Park and Trail Construction	Complete designs, specifications, and construction documents for each phase identified in the recommendation above. As funds become available, bid and construct the scope of work outlined in each successive phase.