Southwestern Pennsylvania Citizens’ Vision for Smart Growth:

Strengthening Communities and Regional Economy

Version 1

Sustainable Pittsburgh
About This Report

The **Southwestern Pennsylvania Citizens’ Vision for Smart Growth** (Citizens’ Vision) reviews principles of Smart Growth for the region’s economic prosperity. It explores the need to connect land use planning and investment in infrastructure to focus development on priority growth areas, and it serves as a guide for assessing the sustainability of community investments, economic development proposals, and infrastructure projects.

Since beginning the visioning process approximately two years ago, Sustainable Pittsburgh has, through regional forums, engaged hundreds of people and many organizations in dialogue about mutual concerns regarding the future of the metropolitan region and that of their own communities. Citizens’ Vision is based on what people see as the region’s core assets – a diverse set of livable communities and their environmental surroundings. It strives to optimize region-wide efficiencies with the intent of attracting investments, particularly those associated with the “new” economy, that might not otherwise be made here. Sustainable Pittsburgh has created presentations about the region’s development history to help facilitate these discussions. These land patterns are presented here to illustrate the need for a regional land use plan.

The online pdf version of this document shows full-color pages, including maps and graphics. For optimal legibility, color printing is recommended.
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INTRODUCTION

Citizens’ Vision is based on expressions of concerned citizens and on past regional planning efforts. It provides policy recommendations on challenges and opportunities for our region to:

- Capitalize on the reality that economic competitiveness for jobs, residents, and visitors is determined at the regional level and above.
- Attract investment to the region and reduce financial costs caused by sprawl and disinvestments in our existing communities.
- Strengthen communities by responding to growing market demand for traditional neighborhood development, urban living, mixed use and income environments, and conservation-minded development, while curbing sprawl.
- Preserve and promote existing villages, towns, and cities as significant places for living and commerce.
- Enhance the region’s air and water quality and preserve open space for future generations.
- Reduce dependency on cars in favor of public transportation.
- Close the social equity gap of growing socio-economic disparities and racial segregation.
- Take advantage of the new tools and incentives provided by the Commonwealth to manage growth by identifying “Growth Areas” and “Rural Resource Areas” as priorities for public investment.

Sustainable Pittsburgh believes that if principles of sustainable development are applied in Southwestern Pennsylvania using Smart Growth practices, the pace of sprawl will be slowed and eventually halted, resulting in greater social equity, environmental quality, and economic prosperity.

Our expectation in presenting the Citizens’ Vision to the region is that people will agree that we can have both growth and sustainable development. The premise is straightforward – conscious choices about where to steer growth and development should be made regionally. We are not doing this today. The region is sprawling. Inefficiencies created by sprawl work to the detriment of taxpayers, major investors, “at risk” populations, and the environment. Inefficient land use is the consequence of the lack of a regional land use plan to guide growth and infrastructure investments, outdated zoning and ordinances that limit developers’ options, lack of consistent professional planning throughout the region’s fragmented governance, and policies that subsidize sprawl.

Regional Smart Growth can ensure that Southwestern Pennsylvania’s most prominent assets, its livable communities and environmental surroundings, will be sustained. Certainly institutional and governmental reforms are needed. But a vision comes first. The Citizens’ Vision advocates regional land use planning and maps a Smart Growth vision for multimunicipal and county collaboration.

The Citizens’ Vision is offered to spark public discussion and debate and serve as a guide to planning efforts and assessments of new development proposals at the regional, county, and municipal levels such as:

- economic development initiatives
- transportation projects
- regionally significant residential communities
- extensions of sewer and water service areas
- other environmental enhancements

It is anticipated that civic leaders, elected officials, and candidates for office will embrace the substance of Citizens’ Vision and bring necessary changes to regional organizations, and county and municipal governmental units to redirect the region’s land use in line with the principles of Smart Growth.
Southwestern Pennsylvania has a population of about 2.3 million people in nine counties and over 500 municipalities. The region's population peaked in 1960; our population today is what it was in 1940. In the last census virtually every region in the nation grew in population. Pittsburgh did not. Nor did the region. Nevertheless, consumption of land – especially some valued environmental assets – has been extensive.

The map illustrates the location of homes throughout the region by 1950 (over one-third of the region's homes were built by 1950) as well as the outward expanding housing built after 1950. Fifty years ago, households were concentrated along the river valleys and in the county seats that served as business centers. The outward migration evidenced is supported by U.S. Department of Agriculture data indicating that between 1982 and 1997 nearly half (43 percent) as much land as had been previously developed was built on, paved, or otherwise developed despite a regional population decline of 8 percent (Sustainable Pittsburgh's Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Sustainability Indicators Report 2002). We have a shrinking population base and a shrinking resource base, yet we are expanding our expenditures in terms of infrastructure and land. The trend is not sustainable.

"If you regard sprawl not as congestion but as [inefficient] use of land, Pittsburgh did not perform very well in the 1990s. Pittsburgh, in fact, could be considered one of the worst sprawling places in the country…If we were talking about Austin [Texas], this would be different, but, this is a region that lost population. The region as a whole needs to step back and ask, 'Are these development patterns in the greater good?' Or, 'Does this just spread around the population more in a way that weakens the core?" said Bruce Katz, a senior fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based (Brookings Institute) public policy think tank.

Scholar says area sprawl worse than L.A.'s June 08, 2001, Pittsburgh-Post Gazette
Generally, our older communities have declined the most. They were developed under different modes of transportation, typically pedestrian and streetcar, and were each distinguished by their environmental settings and economic reasons for being. Streets were laid out in a grid except along creek beds. Retail areas, schools, post offices and banks, and other public places were nearby. Public services, including police and fire stations and central water and sewer, complemented these livable communities.

By comparison, today’s new communities have a different scale and design. In most cases in our region, it is no longer legal to build the traditional mixed use neighborhoods that have long defined our population centers. Today’s zoning tends to be oriented to maximizing revenue for municipal budgets rather than being first oriented to building livable communities. Such “fiscal zoning,” for example, specifically limits options in favor of low population density cul-de-sac

**Municipal Impacts**

Southwestern Pennsylvania has sprawled in all compass directions. Population declines since 1960 and a redistribution of residential and non-residential activities have led to the decline of older communities, contributed to social and economic disparities, infringed on formerly productive agricultural lands, and usurped other environmental assets.

Growth and decline of the region’s communities is startling. Seventy percent of municipalities have fewer residents today then they did 60 years ago – and this is nowhere more dramatic than in Pittsburgh. In the map on page 5, the red circles represent net municipal population losses. They are concentrated in Pittsburgh, river valleys, municipalities, and in the county seats. The areas highlighted in green are those that grew in population.

**2002 Annual Report on Land Use, PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development**
residential developments segregated from retail and commercial uses. Growth in the region is occurring at lower densities where shopping, jobs, and housing are typically separated. Traffic congestion and service demands for water, sewer, police, and fire are on the rise and so are public costs. At the same time there is a growing market for work/live opportunities in places that have inviting main streets and a sense of community typical of the region’s old neighborhoods. Simply put, outdated zoning is out of step with emerging market demand for communities not dependent on cars that feature neighborly interactions and are set respectfully into their natural environments.
Sprawl often grows suburbs at the expense of older downtowns’ ability to survive. For example, Uniontown, like most other county seats, is working hard to redevelop its business district. All the while, new shopping strips, big box retailers like Wal-Mart, or malls on the outskirts of town divert customers. Time and time again communities approve real estate developments on the promise of economic benefit based on relocating businesses or residents who bring their taxes with them from one municipality to another. In a region with declining population, this tallies to no net gain in economic development – another unintended consequence of “fiscal zoning.”

With retailers and personal service businesses simply following their markets and competing for customers, the public policy question becomes: To what degree should public funds foster this predatory behavior among retailers? If, for example, tax revenues were shared between county seats like Uniontown and their surrounding townships, there would at least be a sharing of revenues that would ease the decline felt by residents and businesses that remain in the county seat.

While the older established cities (Pittsburgh, McKeesport, New Kensington, and all the county seats) have smaller populations today than in 1940, they have livable neighborhoods that are safe, walkable, and friendly. In neighborhoods that are not as livable, community development actions can raise well-being, position them for economic renewal, and sustain community social fabric.

The development strategy for smaller cities, particularly the county seats, is continued renewal and re-densification – done collaboratively with their neighboring townships. Sustainable Pittsburgh believes all of these older central places had locational advantages when they were the most prominent commercial centers a couple of generations ago. With good fortune and hard community-based work they can be livable communities poised to attract investment and grow.

Sprawl in many metro areas around the nation has been driven by region-wide economic and population growth. Sprawl in our region, however, has not been in response to increasing population. It has resulted in the:

- decline of many of the region’s older towns
- new “edge cities” that siphon investment from older business districts
- expensive public services that have not been offset by real region-wide growth
- distancing of jobs from workers
- gradually increasing traffic congestion
- consumption of valuable environmental assets and farm land
- increased incidents of flooding and contaminated storm water runoff resulting from grading and paving for real estate developments
- increased costs to taxpayers related to financing new infrastructure, traffic congestion, energy use, air pollution, car dependency, and an increasing disparities gap between races and haves and have nots
- growing spatial mismatch between those needing entry level jobs and the location of new jobs

Declining population coupled with increasing conversion of land from open space to development means we are not being efficient with our resources which ultimately makes the region less attractive for investment.

“*When you spend $100 at the chain Borders Books & Music, your purchase creates only $13 worth of local economic activity.* That same $100 spent at a locally owned book or record store generates $45, or more than three times as much local economic activity.”

Conclusion of a new study, *Economic Impact Analysis: A Case Study* conducted by Civic Economics and published by Livable City in Austin, Texas.
**Smart Growth Responses:**

To advance our region’s quality of life and competitiveness, Citizens’ Vision proposes to:

- Provide incentives for multimunicipal plans and revenue sharing in support of Smart Growth.

- Strengthen community development corporations’ capacity to market their neighborhoods, redevelop vacant properties, revitalize main streets, and engage in regional infrastructure planning and investment.

- Use public transportation to foster redevelopment through Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and Location Efficient Mortgages (LEM). (TOD uses public infrastructure to foster adjacent dense development to put housing and jobs near transit. LEM provides below market home financing for places located close to public transportation access).

- Foster locally-owned businesses.

- Promote infill and brownfield and grayfield development in older communities and increase residential and employment densities (align public transportation to these priorities).

- Support a mix of development (residential, commercial, office space, community schools, parks).

- Encourage preservation of historic and cultural resources.

- Develop housing that accommodates a range of incomes, family sizes, and ages including low- and very-low income residents.

- Develop bicycle and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that are connected to and integrated with shopping areas and employment centers.

- Intensify public transportation services as a means of offering people options to using cars.

- Save tax dollars by using and upgrading existing infrastructure.

- Develop indicators of sustainability to gauge progress.

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**SOCIAL IMPACTS**

A key finding of Sustainable Pittsburgh’s Regional Sustainability Indicators Report is that we often know very little in hard data terms about equity issues. And where data exits, it reveals deep and disturbing disparities among people in our region particularly with regard to race and economic status. John Powell, Director of the Institute on Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, who keynoted the region’s 3rd Annual Smart Growth Conference on May 31, 2003, shed light on how sprawling land use trends drive racial and economic polarization. Powell explained that 1940 was the pinnacle of population in many regions around the nation whereby 60 percent of Americans living in metropolitan areas lived in 192 cities. As African-Americans and later Latinos and others started coming to the central cities, the federal government, first through housing and then through an aggressive highway program, started subsidizing white flight outside the city causing dramatic change in the landscape. Today 60 percent of Americans living in a metro area do not live in a central city. Instead, they are distributed across 9,600 separate jurisdictions. The nation is much more fragmented today. Powell asserts that the more fragmented a region, the more racially and economically segregated it becomes. His clincher, “Of course it may surprise many that the most fragmented region in the country is Pittsburgh…and so we built this system that is very racialized but now it can operate without even making reference to race. We’ve structured disparities into the environment and it has become rational to do the irrational. It becomes rational for communities to not cooperate, to compete for tax base, to plan without regard to spillover impacts on neighboring communities, and by engaging in exclusionary zoning to keep out people who live in the center city and older suburbs who are low and moderate income.”

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>“What we need to do in this city and in any region around the country is build quality of place. That goes beyond creating venture capital funds, that goes beyond creating high-technology incubators, that goes beyond increasing the R&D assets. We have to make our region places people want to live and work.”

Richard Florida  
Champions of Sustainability forum series  
March 15, 2000
“Low-skill employment opportunities are growing outside the core area of the region, while low-cost housing opportunities remain concentrated in the core area creating both transportation and equity issues.”

Regional Public Transportation Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania: Strategic Vision (commissioned by SPC and the Port Authority of Allegheny County)

The adjacent map shows wealthy and poor households are concentrated in different parts of the region. These patterns have become more pronounced over the decades with location a racially encoded determinant of providing or denying opportunity.

According to The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, approximately 88 percent of the nation’s people living in poverty reside in or around urban centers. Sprawl hurts the poor, and it makes older communities in our region less attractive and livable. There is a self-fulfilling cycle of community decline at play. Businesses that serve residents must “follow” their customers and too often this means relocating to the suburbs. As the demand for real estate diminishes in older centers, so does the basis for taxation. It then follows that quality of public services deteriorates due to inadequate funding. In response, tax rates are raised with the burden of community decline shouldered by those with the least ability to pay, the people left behind. This trend has widened the growing disparities gap in our region.

“A new study by Good Jobs First finds that at least 66 U.S. jurisdictions now apply job quality standards to recipients of economic development subsidies. The standards range in the types of workforce development issues addressed, including health insurance requirements. There is no indication that the standards have adversely affected the “business climate” of their respective jurisdictions. In fact the standards mesh well with employers’ needs for employee retention and skills enhancement.”

Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board
For the communities in our region where significant concentration of poor households exist, the consequences of sprawl include:

- Deteriorating housing that is occupied by a disproportionate number of low and moderate income families.
- Polarization and segregation economically and racially with concentration of poverty affecting small cities and urban centers the worst.
- Reduced property values and tax capacity to provide services.
- Deteriorating schools and quality of education.
- Distancing of jobs from where people live and increase of low-wage, no-benefits service jobs in the suburbs.

**Smart Growth Responses:**

New ways to govern the revitalization of the region’s older communities must be defined. Citizens’ Vision connects priorities of regional equity and land use reform. Certainly, the long-term resolution of this issue is halting sprawl and making the revitalization of older communities easier. But in the meantime, it is prudent to consider these approaches to reducing the inequitable burden on residents:

- Reduce reliance on property tax or introduce tax base sharing.
- Decrease disparity in funding between school districts and increase state share funding for schools.
- Increase incentives for housing rehabilitation, affordable/workforce housing, community revitalization, infill development and redevelopment with emphasis on providing economic opportunities for residents, i.e., jobs.
- Maintain and expand public transportation service to older communities.
- Incorporate principles of quality health care, transportation, housing, and childcare into land development ordinances to promote economic development that benefits low-income persons.
- Advance community restoration as a strategy for economic stimulus.
- Provide incentives for companies to build in communities with working class housing opportunities.
- Provide an increased level of mortgage assistance and credit repair programs to aspiring homeowners.
- Develop more means to acquire vacant and abandoned properties in low income areas.

**SEWER AND WATER SYSTEMS MAY FOSTER SPRAWL**

There are more than 200 sewer service providers and 300 water suppliers in the region, more than half of which serve fewer than 1,500 customers. Since water and sewer infrastructure is necessary for new development, these providers have de facto authority to influence the density and location of new developments in our region.

The complexity of this service delivery system is documented and analyzed in the recently released report, *Investing in Clean Water.* The report’s conclusion that a regional resolution of this complex administrative issue would require cooperation among public and private organizations “on a scale never before seen in this region,” is supported by the finding that without regional cooperation, the cost of making the necessary repairs and upgrades to water and wastewater systems is estimated at $10 billion or more over the
next 10 years, more than twice the level of investment made in those systems over the past decade. According to the study, in Allegheny County alone, more than 16 billion gallons of mixed rainwater and raw sewage overflow into area waterways each year because the current system cannot handle the volume. As a result, 500,000 residents are at risk from unreliable or polluted water supplies, inadequate wastewater systems, or both.

As a primary method of containing sprawl, Citizens’ Vision advocates defining “Growth Areas” (as authorized by the PA Municipalities Code) and containing growth within them. And, Citizens’ Vision advocates a moratorium on direct and indirect public investments in sewer and water systems outside of areas that are currently served (unless there are compelling public health issues that can only be resolved by providing such systems without new service being added). Fiscal expediency alone rationalizes steering development first to existing communities to simultaneously fix, upgrade, and use in-place surplus capacity as opposed to building new elsewhere. For many communities the surplus capacity can be turned into economic advantage for economic redevelopment.

This containment concept is more realistic than some may believe as:

- Capital expenditures needed to upgrade and maintain sewer and water systems in the ground today are extraordinary and require a new level of coordination.
- Surplus capacities of existing systems hold promise for redevelopment to meet future demand under a “Growth Areas” scenario.
- Suburban land use is already restricted by environmental regulations that protect the environment and ensure adequate potable water and sanitary sewer treatment are available. These limitations coupled with zoning can guide public investment in sewer and water service to determine where development will occur.

“Southwestern Pennsylvania’s waters are a priceless asset for residents, recreation, industry, and agriculture. To adequately protect that resource, we must make greater investments in infrastructure, and spend that money more wisely... Without such an effort the region’s waters will continue to suffer from a quiet crisis hidden from public view – contamination from malfunctioning and inadequate sewer and septic systems. Southwestern Pennsylvania will risk a loss of momentum in economic development efforts and a threat to its quality of life, as well as the likelihood of more severe and expensive enforcement actions from state and federal regulators.”

Statements by Dr. Jared Cohon, President of Carnegie Mellon University and other community leaders. Investing in Clean Water website
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS

The region has rich natural assets. These precious assets:

- Contribute to quality of life, economic development, increased property values, and places where people want to live.

- Provide “natural services” such as drinking water and agricultural production. Wetlands control floods; trees and vegetation filter pollutants, hold soil, consume carbon dioxide, and produce oxygen.

- Provide outdoor recreation opportunities for healthy lifestyles and spiritual enrichment.

- Support biodiversity – the basis for all life.

The adjacent map shows our rivers, tributaries, lakes, ponds, and wetlands separated by thousands of ridgelines from which valley floors of all varieties are found. Watersheds determined to be of “high quality” or “exceptional value” are highlighted. There is much to protect and enhance through regional planning.

Most of the region’s oldest communities are located along rivers because they once served as transportation corridors. Maintaining water quality standards is directly influenced by land use and is fundamental to the region’s well-being.

The lower map shows parts of the region that contain land where soil is very suitable for agriculture. This land, particularly when not steeply sloped, is also suitable for real estate development. The challenge is to conserve agricultural lands as they add economic value either through agricultural production or as an intrinsic amenity.
In calling for “Rural Resource Areas,” Citizens’ Vision supports municipalities that designate “Agricultural Security Areas” (ASA) specific to areas with capacity to produce agricultural products. The accompanying map identifies ASA. The Commonwealth ASA designations prevent municipalities from unreasonably restricting farm structures and practices. Designated properties are eligible for consideration under the Commonwealth’s program to purchase development rights, a technique for preserving farmland.

The map demonstrates that Environmentally Significant Areas (parks, gamelands, trails, and bio-diversity areas) are also found throughout our region. There are hardly any municipalities in which one or more of these areas do not exist. In this sense, all municipal officials must be stewards of the environment – enabling active or passive use or preservation of Bio-Diversity Areas (defined as “habitats for plants, animals, and natural communities recognized as state or national species of special concern”).

Taken together, the environmental assets depicted on the adjacent composite map are those that remain after the last few decades of sprawl which has overrun much of the region’s open space not previously protected by publicly accountable ownerships.

In SP’s regional forums, citizens repeatedly expressed concern and wrestled with the same question:

*How can new development be steered to the region’s existing communities while preserving viable farmland, environmental assets, and other valued open space?*
**Smart Growth Responses:**
To protect environmental resources, open space, agriculture, and provide recreational opportunities, Citizens’ Plan proposes to:

- Assure that for every one acre of land developed, one acre is permanently protected from development.*
- Continue to develop a regional system of trails and greenways (connected to communities and schools and work with linkages to public transportation).
- Conserve and protect natural resources and farmland.
- Assess and maintain water quality and aggressively clean water resources.
- Define and track measurable indicators of ecosystem and species health as a basis for their preservation and enhancement.
- Prohibit Tax Increment Financing in any rural setting; it was created for redevelopment of blighted urban areas, not greenfields.
- Incorporate outcomes of the Natural Infrastructure Project (Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Southwestern PA Commission) into county and municipal comprehensive plans to underpin their planning of development and infrastructure.


**Transportation Linkages**
Investments in transportation and other infrastructure directly influence development in the region’s urban, suburban, and rural communities. By conscientiously deciding how (with what incentives attached) and where to spend infrastructure dollars, we can rationally and with a long-term view guide market demand, shape development patterns, and assist communities that are competing for businesses, residents, and jobs. This is a key message of the *Regional Public...*
Citizens’ Vision: Proposed Policies for the Region’s Smart Growth

Citizens’ Vision calls for a regional development strategy to restore our competitive economic advantage and foster investments that might not otherwise be made here in the future. Quality begets quality and it follows that businesses and investors favor regions that implement planning to protect and enhance investments. Quality of life is also key to attracting and retaining residents and businesses. Planning is necessary to enhance our diverse communities and their surrounding environments. The development concept builds on Southwestern Pennsylvania’s current state of development which, sprawl aside, offers a range of communities more diverse than at any point in its history. The development strategy is to stabilize future population change in most municipalities and increase population in a few places that have potential to intensify and grow in cost-effective ways.

“This is an ambitious and bold plan that requires new ways of thinking about public transportation alternatives, land use, and the political and financial mechanisms that have traditionally been in place in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The old ways of making decisions regarding land use and transportation infrastructure must be altered in the Region if it is to remain competitive in the world economy. We ask citizens and community leaders of Southwestern Pennsylvania to each take up the challenges presented in these pages.”

Regional Public Transportation Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania: Strategic Vision

1940: The land use-transportation relationship was healthy. Most people lived near their work. Transit played an important role.

TODAY: The land use-transportation relationship has become dysfunctional. More people travel longer distances on more congested roads than ever before.

A well funded and expansive freeway system and a poorly-funded and contracted transit system has encouraged our region to consume land and resources without an increasing population. The result is a poorly connected region with areas that are economically distressed and isolated.
To gauge citizens’ responses to Smart Growth concepts, SP administered a survey about community design principles and development management alternatives at public forums held around the region to gain input on Citizens’ Vision. Preferences were for Smart Growth practices, intergovernmental coordination of development and infrastructure investments, and a more “business-like” approach to governing communities – particularly comprehensive approaches that foster multimunicipal and regional planning. Some of the key Smart Growth principles derived from these surveys constitute the Citizens’ Vision whose public policy recommendations are to:

- Create regional, county, and multimunicipal comprehensive land use plans (as outlined in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code; see Appendix 2) that are consistent with each other, used to manage all land uses, integrated with infrastructure plans, tied to capital improvement programming, linked to school district and municipal authority plans, and premised on build-out projections of capacity in land, housing, roads, and other infrastructure.
- Provide incentives to increase the number of County and multimunicipal comprehensive land use plans that specifically identify “Growth Areas” as prerequisites for public investment for development in existing places. (“Future Growth Areas” are not advocated as the region’s overall population is likely to continue declining and the region’s in-place surplus infrastructure seems adequate to meet the space needed to accommodate new economic and community development.)
- Limit public investment for development and redevelopment to “Growth Areas” whose boundaries are defined by areas currently served by public sewers and whose existing places are currently or were previously developed (including abutting brownfield sites even if not sewered). Land outside the sewered “Growth Areas” would be designated as “Rural Resource Areas.” (The strategy of containing growth in the “Growth Areas” is a concession to the reality of sprawl – stopping sprawl at the existing areas already provided by public sewers.)
- Allow public investments in sewer and water systems only in areas that are currently served except to address compelling health problems of existing places without expanding capacities for new development.
- Discourage new development and its necessary infrastructure outside the “Growth Areas.”
- Provide incentives for development projects to include a mix of residential, commercial, and civic uses that promote the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking as an alternative to the car.
- Use public transportation and other infrastructure investments to channel growth and promote intensified redevelopment and infill development to achieve the regional land use plan, not vice versa.
- Adopt “Place-Based” (community building) “Fix It First” (priority for fixing existing infrastructure vs. new capacity) public investment policy and capital budgeting process.
- Increase public transportation investments (over new highway capacity) to link the region’s population centers.
- Link “Growth Areas” through appropriate cost-effective and efficient modes of transportation (including bike/pedestrian linkages) with the highest priority given to “Transit Oriented Development” at multi-modal centers.
- Limit private investments, particularly those associated with “greenfield” developments, in “Rural Resource Areas” via local zoning and high environmental standards enforced by Commonwealth and national government environmental regulators. “Greenfield” development should be essentially self-contained, non-polluting and not subsidized directly or indirectly by public financing.
- Conserve environmental assets and, where possible, connect with greenways and trails. Use land-banking or incentive-based processes that protect prime land in designated “Rural Resource Areas” where agricultural and other compatible use of land is viable.
- Implement sustainable development practices such as project-based

Sustainable Pittsburgh, in conjunction with partners, anticipates monitoring progress toward these Smart Growth principles/practices and will maintain an information system that measures progress on indicators of regional sustainable development. (www.sustainablepittsburgh.org “Regional Indicators”) Citizens’ Vision advocates that public policy and subsidies, as well as public investments in public transportation, infill housing and other infrastructure, be focused on existing developed places within the “Growth Areas.”

“About half of the 2,500 acres abandoned by big steel have been redeveloped…that means the glass is still half-empty…we could be working better to make sure that new developments are integrated with the existing communities and [complement] the existing businesses.”

Deb Lange, CMU Brownfields Center
Pittsburgh Magazine, March 2003
Furthermore, the sustainable development of existing places within the “Growth Areas” is best achieved through multimunicipal arrangements with adjacent municipalities for purposes of comprehensive planning and, ultimately, revenue sharing and the consolidation of services that are provided cost-effectively through such arrangements.

The accompanying map depicts the portion of our region presently served by public sewer as well as environmental assets. Citizens’ Vision advocates sewer areas be the region’s “Growth Areas” as regional development and redevelopment priorities. Land outside is considered “Rural Resource Areas” for land conservation and agriculture.

Throughout the “Growth Areas” there are many existing older towns that have surplus infrastructure capacities and public service capabilities due to their population decline. These traditional communities and a number of existing new ones can be ideal locations for pedestrian oriented, higher density employment, mixed-use, affordable/working class housing – places whose growth is referred to by the Commonwealth Municipal Planning Code as Traditional Neighborhood Development (see Appendix 2). They have the potential to support an internal and external transportation system that provides for more modes of travel. Such Smart Growth would also reduce demand for travel outside the community, retain community dollars, and create conditions for qualified workers to connect with quality jobs.
CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS: REFORMS FOR THE REGION’S SMART GROWTH

To implement Citizens’ Vision, a regional approach is necessary to put all the infrastructure (public transportation, sewer, water, other utilities) and development investments together into a genuinely comprehensive regional plan. It needs to be underpinned by a restructured decision making process that links land use and transportation decisions and encourages local government reform while enhancing the region’s diverse set of livable communities.

As Citizens’ Vision is discussed and its substance modified, it will be impossible not to consider the difficult issue associated with institutional reform, particularly in the governmental units that can make or break the goal of a regional approach to Smart Growth. Optimism is found, however, in recognizing the building momentum for these kinds of reforms and a growing number of very promising initiatives. For example, a growing list of local governments around the region are undertaking joint planning efforts (listed at www.sustainablepittsburgh.org/inventory%20joint%20municipal%20%20%20%20-01.htm). More specifically:

- Plum Borough is crafting new ordinances that would allow for traditional neighborhood development.
- The Municipality of Murrysville and the Borough of Export are proposing a unified development code and non-residential design guidelines.
- Cranberry is proposing new “performance zoning” allowing higher densities and assessing impact fees on new development.
- Allegheny, Armstrong, Westmoreland, and Washington Counties are developing comprehensive plans.
- The Natural Infrastructure Project is presently facilitating the development of a detailed regional plan that will promote ways to develop recreational opportunities, conserve important natural areas, and enhance the region’s economic vitality by better using natural infrastructure.
- Allegheny County adopted the Regional Asset District tax for revenue sharing to fund public amenities.
- The Natural Infrastructure Project is presently facilitating the development of a detailed regional plan that will promote ways to develop recreational opportunities, conserve important natural areas, and enhance the region’s economic vitality by better using natural infrastructure.
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- The Three Rivers Wet Weather Demonstration is addressing the issue of untreated sewage overflowing by promoting cost-effective, long-term, sustainable solutions. See www.3riverswetweather.org.

These examples are very important because there are extraordinary pressures for county and municipal governments, particularly their authorities, to maintain the status quo. Multimunicipal authorities, most of which charge user fees, are governed by public officials whose primary responsibilities are to make their governmental units successful as public “businesses,” often by expanding service areas by procuring public financing for capital improvements. It would be difficult for any authority board to condition its decision making on wider regional considerations. This same logic applies to municipal officials whose primary responsibility is to serve their municipality’s best interests.

In other words there are no villains; public officials just discharge their responsibilities as the existing
system and laws permit. They are bounded by the system even if they disagree with it. So when they join neighbors to plan or otherwise manage their communities it shows political courage that SP endorses and hopes will proliferate. Indeed, much of this strategy depends on multimunicipal comprehensive visioning and land use planning.

At this time, the region lacks a system of regional governance directly accountable to the citizenry. No one is elected to serve the metropolitan region as a whole. No genuinely comprehensive regional plan exists to manage the fundamental linkages between transportation, land use, development and redevelopment efforts, natural resources, and infrastructure.

Prospects for a process to ensure consistencies between regional, county, municipal, public authority, and school district planning and programming are limited by the political reality of bargaining and negotiating rather than Smart Growth planning – and the tough decisions that come with it.

The only regional agency that could make a claim to evolve into such an organization is the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) which serves as the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Economic Development District. Its past regional planning efforts demonstrate the intent to identify a regional land use plan (as reviewed in Appendix 1). Citizens’ Vision acknowledges this precedent of the legitimacy of SPC advancing a regional plan. However, implementing targeted growth areas has eluded SPC. This is likely attributable to SPC’s governance structure. First, land use authority is delegated to each individual municipality in the Commonwealth. Counties do not even have land use jurisdiction (unless municipalities forego their own zoning). Thus SPC does not have direct land use authority in the region other than what municipalities and Counties might do voluntarily. However, SPC could tie strings to funding it administers. Incentives to adhere to a regional plan could include higher priority capital improvements programs in return for smart growth practices, etc. Citizens’ Vision advocates this approach giving the agency a large role in steering the region’s smart growth through investment in infrastructure that determines growth patterns.

Furthermore, advancing toward an SPC where plans, programs, and priorities address targeted funding distribution and resource allocation as prioritized through designation of “Growth Areas” in step with a regional land use plan, calls for careful review of the make up of the SPC board itself. Citizens’ Vision advocates for the study and review of the evolving role of progressive MPOs around the nation to address considerations such as:

— Is SPC’s decision-making structure reflective of the differences in population and economic impact amongst the member counties?
— Are there alternatives to the region’s County Commissioners determining the majority of SPC’s voting representatives?
— Does the SPC board include a sufficient number of representatives specifically charged with serving the region as a whole?

Investment in this vision will serve to stabilize and densify significant existing residential and commercial concentrations and curb the pace of sprawl in our region. Citizens’ Plan will result in more choice for livable communities in which to live, work, and play and increased investment by private and nonprofit developers in new or rehabilitated housing, commercial, retail, and light industrial development at existing developments within the “Growth Areas.” And Citizens’ Plan’s policy recommendations will contribute to regional equity and narrowing the disparities gap.

Sustainable Pittsburgh will continue to foster grassroots efforts that are capturing the attention of many farsighted officials and leadership groups in the civic community. We expect to see more and more responsible agencies and private interests conducting Sustainability Assessments and we celebrate the fact that many are now speaking in terms of the inextricable linkage between economic well-being, equity, Smart Growth, and livable communities. Citizens’ Vision is achievable and will move Southwestern Pennsylvania increasingly toward a model for regional competitiveness and livable communities.

Sustainable Pittsburgh encourages organizations, businesses, and individuals to sign on as endorsing partners to Citizens’ Vision to express their support of Smart Growth for strengthening communities and the regional economy.
The following organizations and local governments hosted the Regional Land Use Trends and Regional Sustainability Indicators forums in cooperation with Sustainable Pittsburgh between February 2001 and February 2003.

- Beaver County Chamber of Commerce
- Beaver Initiative for Growth
- Borough of Canonsburg
- Butler County Planning Commission
- Canonsburg Renaissance Group
- Cranberry Township
- Fayette Forward
- Fayette Chamber of Commerce
- Hill Consensus Group
- Mon Valley Initiative
- Mon Valley Providers Council
- Monroeville Area Chamber of Commerce
- Municipality of Monroeville
- Regional Coalition of Community Builders
- Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County
APPENDIX 1

Precedents: Regional Land Use Planning

Precedents from our region of two types inform and rationalize creation of the Citizens’ Vision:

a) The region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), for more than 30 years, has issued planning documents that present the bases for a regional land use plan. (MPO is a term for agencies recognized by the federal government to carry out federally funded transportation plans and programs through a coordinated, comprehensive, and continuing process). The region’s MPO, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), formerly called itself the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission (SPRPC).

b) Recent studies referenced in the Citizens’ Vision on infrastructure that demonstrate support for Smart Growth principles.

A. Metropolitan Planning Organization past regional plans

Looking Toward the Year 2075 (SPRPC report of August 1973) suggested a focused growth regional development strategy based on essentially the same principles of Smart Growth practices espoused by the Citizens’ Vision. SPRPC’s report set five priorities for managed growth targeted to existing communities:

1. Revitalize the central city,
2. Create new town centers within the existing metropolitan area,
3. Create new towns beyond the built-up area if warranted by population growth,
4. Develop a balanced transportation system in coordination with land development programs, and
5. Create better natural environments through reservations of recreational areas.

This land development philosophy presented in Looking Toward the Year 2075 underpinned SPRPC’s first policy area plan, Toward a Regional Plan, Development Policies for the Next Thirty Years (SPRPC 1970).

SPRPC’s 1970 Policy Areas Plan

The 1970 SPRPC plan framework was a set of policy areas, depicted on the adjacent map, to be used as a general guide to development until 2000. As such, the region’s planning agency acknowledged the need for a regional approach to growth management and expressed its commitment to development concepts now known as “Smart Growth” practices. SPRPC adopted this “land use element” as required for its transportation plan. At that time the regional agency had some influence over development, particularly related to categorical grants for parks, sewer, and water facilities. There was, however, no direct authority for controlling growth other than persuading municipalities to use their land use ordinances in progressive ways.
In 1991 SPRPC, like other MPOs, began operating under the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). “The ISTEA concept was simple. Transportation spending should focus on more than just roads. The country needed to invest in a more balanced, multi-modal approach to mobility and accessibility.”* Accordingly, ISTEA stresses planning and programming based on a broader set of land use, development, and environmental considerations and more regionally focused transportation improvement programming. In response, in 1994 SPRPC redefined a more detailed set of land use policy areas based on much more specific information about development, environmental assets, and infrastructure.

* A Guide to Transportation Enhancements: Enhancing Communities, National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse

B. Two current regional infrastructure studies – precedents for change today?

Investing in Clean Water: A Report from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Water and Sewer Infrastructure Project Steering Committee, 2002

The study concerns the complex system of providing water and sewer systems services and details the regional sewer and water infrastructure crisis. The region has more sites that dump sewage-laced storm water into rivers and streams during rainy weather than any other region in the country. In the study Smart Growth practices underpin recommendations that would foster development in “targeted growth areas” and prescribe analyzes of cost-efficient infrastructure investments. In his asserting need for “cooperating on a scale never before seen in this region,” Bill Strickland, (“Forum: Clean Water is Everyone’s Business,” Pittsburgh Post Gazette, May 26, 2002) a member of the Investing in Clean Water oversight committee reinforces a key report finding: “…the provision of publicly funded water and sewer infrastructure can, if poorly planned, stimulate unplanned growth, known as sprawl. Consideration of mechanisms for limiting sprawl should be incorporated into any effort to add substantial new water and sewer infrastructure.”

Regional Public Transportation Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania: Strategic Vision (commissioned by SPC and the Port Authority of Allegheny County)

The study calls for “Focused Growth” to surmount “fragmentation…and continuing focus on expansion of the regional highway and utility infrastructure (that) have created (a) regional development pattern that has promoted suburban development at the expense of older, depopulating communities, and at the expense of public transportation.” The report is profound in that its findings substantiate the necessary link between land use and transportation planning. It asserts that without focusing growth to achieve densities of population centers, public transportation cannot be cost effective. Therefore, land use and transportation must be planned together on a regional level to achieve focused growth.

Sustainable Pittsburgh found these two reports (Investing in Clean Water and Regional Public Transportation Plan for SWPA: Strategic Vision) and the earlier MPO policy area plans to be important guides and precedents for creating this Citizens’ Vision. More importantly, Sustainable Pittsburgh found that its engaging people and organizations independently of those convened by the authors of these aforementioned reports has reinforced drafting of Citizens’ Vision. The coincidence of independently determined visions – on Focused Growth and unprecedented cooperation – is a strong indication that regional Smart Growth practices are supported by key regional leaders, knowledgeable professionals, and concerned citizens.
APPENDIX 2

Commonwealth Municipal Planning Code Definitions

Public Participation in County or Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plans
The planning process shall include a public participation process to assure that all governing bodies, municipal authorities, school districts and agencies, whether public or private, having jurisdiction or operating within the area of the plan and landowners and citizens affected by the plan have an opportunity to be heard prior to the public hearings required for the adoption of the plan under section 302(a).

County Comprehensive Plan
A land use and growth management plan prepared by the county planning commission and adopted by the county commissioners which establishes broad goals and criteria for municipalities to use in preparation of their comprehensive plan and land use regulation.

Designated Growth Area
A region within a county or counties described in a municipal or multimunicipal plan that preferably includes and surrounds a city, borough or village, and within which residential and mixed use development is permitted or planned for at densities of one unit to the acre or more, commercial, industrial and institutional uses are permitted or planned for and public infrastructure services are provided or planned…to accommodate the projected growth of the area within the next 20 years.

Future Growth Area
An area of a municipal or multimunicipal plan outside of and adjacent to a designated growth area where residential, commercial industrial and institutional uses and development are permitted or planned at varying densities and public infrastructure services may or may not be provided, but future development at greater densities is planned to accompany the orderly extension an provision of public infrastructure services.

Multimunicipal Plan
A plan developed and adopted by any number of contiguous municipalities, including a joint municipal plan as authorized by this act.

Multimunicipal Planning Agency
A planning agency comprised of representatives of more than one municipality and constituted as a joint municipal planning commission in accordance with Article XI, or otherwise by resolution of the participating municipalities, to address, on behalf of the participating municipalities, multimunicipal issues, including, but not limited to, agricultural and open space preservation, natural and historic resources, transportation, housing and economic development.

Rural Resource Area
An area described in a municipal or multimunicipal plan within which rural resource uses including, but not limited to, agriculture, timbering, mining, quarrying and other extractive industries, forest and game lands and recreation and tourism are encouraged and enhanced, development that is compatible with or supportive of such uses in permitted, and public infrastructure services are not provided except in villages.

Traditional Neighborhood Development
An area of land developed for a compatible mixture of residential units for various income levels and nonresidential commercial and workplace uses, including some structures that provide for a mix of uses within the same building. Residences, shops, offices, workplaces, public buildings, and parks are interwoven within the neighborhood so that all are within relatively close proximity to each other. Traditional neighborhood development is relatively compact, limited in size and oriented toward pedestrian activity. It has an identifiable center and a discernible edge. The center of the neighborhood is in the form of a public park, commons, plaza, square or prominent intersection of two or more major streets. Generally, there is a hierarchy of streets laid out in a rectilinear or grid pattern of interconnecting streets and blocks that provides multiple routes from origins to destinations and are appropriately designed to serve the needs of pedestrians and vehicles equally.

Transferable Development Rights
The attaching of development rights to specified lands which are desired by a municipality to be kept undeveloped, but permitting those rights to be transferred from those lands so that the development potential which they represent may occur on other lands where more intensive development is deemed to be appropriate.
APPENDIX 3

Sustainable Pittsburgh – Sustainability Assessment

Sustainability Assessments (SA) of public and private development projects and capital improvement programs are necessary to determine long-term impacts and consistency with Smart Growth principles. SAs will help encourage and facilitate the location and expansion of economic/infrastructure development projects which offer equitable job creation, high wages, strengthen and diversify the local and regional economy and existing communities, and protect the environment. SAs can guide development from small, neighborhood projects to major development and/or infrastructure projects with regional significance and impact. The following SA criteria are flexible enough to allow for changes over time and decision makers can add or subtract criterion as conditions and priorities change.

Scope

The Sustainability Assessment criteria should give an indication of whether a development’s or project’s impact will help a community move toward sustainability and its’ livability goals: Equity – investing in economically/socially disadvantaged areas of the region; Environmental – minimizing impacts on sensitive, open, agricultural areas; and, Economic – maintaining and optimizing existing infrastructure. When using the criteria and scoring projects, it is important to provide a brief rationale and project description.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Sustainable Communities: Social Equity and Opportunity</th>
<th>Natural &amp; Built Environment</th>
<th>Sustainable Economy &amp; Business Opportunity</th>
<th>Smart Growth: Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project provides for a number of jobs that will be made available for persons served by welfare transition programs.</td>
<td>Project maintains or enhances the integrity of natural systems and the resource base: - wetlands, water bodies, biodiversity areas, agricultural land, forests and animal or plant species designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service - outdoor recreation areas such as parks, wildlife areas or natural areas - creates urban ecosystems - fosters eco-tourism</td>
<td>Project creates new economic development benefits (such as jobs, higher wages, new industries, etc.) within its immediate location and nearby communities vs. transferring these benefits from another location within the region.</td>
<td>Project is result of citizen participation and enhances the range of choices communities and residents have in transportation, housing, jobs, education and other amenities that make communities desirable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project provides for wage and skill levels relative to those existing in the area.</td>
<td>Project would produce or dispose of no substances designated as hazardous or toxic by the US EPA or by the Department of Environmental Protection.</td>
<td>Project is integrated into the community’s existing infrastructure and its current or potential economic niche.</td>
<td>Project is coordinated with other local governments or other projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project addresses work-life management issues.</td>
<td>Project reduces energy and water use through efficiency measures.</td>
<td>Project enhances local amenities and aesthetics.</td>
<td>Project complies with an existing comprehensive plan and/or a multimunicipal plan adopted by the local government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project positively impacts public health and safety of all socio-economic classes of residents.</td>
<td>Project reduces greenhouse gas emissions by use of renewable energy.</td>
<td>Project encourages preservation of historic and cultural resources (does not impact archaeological sites listed by the Pennsylvania Division of Historical Resources).</td>
<td>Project is in step with local land use regulations adopted by the local government which include a subdivision ordinance for PRDs and a capital improvements plan that are consistent with the local government comprehensive plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project improves community viability functionally and socially.</td>
<td>Project plans for vehicle movement includes strict guidelines for reduction of VOC’s.</td>
<td>Project has demonstrated that the provision and sharing of infrastructure, facilities, or services is in the public interest and not merely for the benefit of the development.</td>
<td>Project meets development order conditions and fiscal mechanisms set by the local government and its development review procedures.</td>
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<td>Project has considered access to employment for the transit dependent.</td>
<td>Project uses natural water quality treatment systems.</td>
<td>Project is participating in a downtown reuse or redevelopment program to improve and rehabilitate a declining downtown area.</td>
<td>Project will not significantly impact adjacent jurisdictions.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Project provides for affordable housing.</td>
<td>Project is registered with or adhering to an environmental management system.</td>
<td>Project includes open space, and recreation areas.</td>
<td>Project has involved the broad participation of local citizens, business, environmental and other civic interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project improves the sense of community and preserves local heritage.</td>
<td>Project has policies to reduce air pollution.</td>
<td>Project is in an existing developed area currently served by public sewer. And the development provides for the construction and maintenance of all on site infrastructures necessary and enters into a contract with the local government to provide appropriate fair-share contribution toward the offsets impacts which the development will impose on publicly funded facilities and services.</td>
<td>Project is compatible with surrounding area (height, facade, landscaping, etc.)</td>
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<td>Project does not create or support development pressures to convert farmland to urban purposes.</td>
<td>Project has considered timing to minimize noise.</td>
<td>Project includes provisions for public transportation on site or contiguous sites and considers the amount of pedestrian or vehicular traffic likely to be generated.</td>
<td>Project reflects integration of public investments, such as transportation, housing, schools, utilities, information infrastructure and other public services.</td>
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<td>Project does not call for or precipitate new investments outside existing population or trade centers.</td>
<td>Project demonstrates best management practices for storm water management, pollution prevention and minimization of storm water runoff (incorporates no dredge and fill activities).</td>
<td>Project fosters locally owned businesses.</td>
<td>Project leverages investment and resources from nonprofit, private and other public sources (local, regional, state, federal.)</td>
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<td>Project relieves traffic congestion, improves the levels of service, and creates other user benefits on the existing or proposed road system within its immediate location, nearby communities, and the region.</td>
<td>Project has a plan to assure that for every one acre of land developed, one acre is permanently protected from development.</td>
<td>Project only uses Tax Increment Financing if in a blighted urban area.</td>
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<td>*LEED Certified (Certified, Silver, Bronze, Gold)</td>
<td>Project will favorably affect the ability of people to find affordable housing in reasonable accessible to workplace employment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project includes energy conservation and minimizes impervious surfaces as appropriate for the location and type of development.</td>
<td>Project fosters investments in existing urban centers and/or abandoned industrial “brownfield or grayfield sites” and/or vacant buildings vs. greenfield sites.</td>
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<td>Project fosters transit oriented design.</td>
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<td>Project includes a mix of uses with one of the uses residential.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Project improves conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Project does not contribute to sprawl.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*S Leadership in Energy and Environmental Designs – Green Building Rating System
Acknowledgements

The development of this report and the process on which it was based was supported by The Richard King Mellon Foundation and The Heinz Endowments. We also thank the hundreds of people from across the region who attended forums to explore regional land use trends and offered comments and ideas for what has become the Citizens’ Vision. Our colleagues at EcoCity Cleveland have our thanks for the inspiration provided by their Citizens’ Bioregional Plan. Sustainable Pittsburgh’s growing list of Affiliates and other partners provide a regular source of guidance and encouragement.

Sustainable Pittsburgh Mission

To affect decision-making in the Pittsburgh Region so that it integrates economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental quality. We do so by building diverse coalitions, developing measurable new indicators as a compass, and undertaking key initiatives. In all of our work we emphasize long term and sustained quality of life for all citizens.

Commitment to Equity

Sustainable development integrates Economy, Environment, and Equity. Acknowledging the persistence of institutional discrimination and resulting disparities gap in basic liberties within Southwestern Pennsylvania, Sustainable Pittsburgh recognizes Equity as an overarching imperative. Social equity for an increasingly diverse citizenry is central to our mission of broadening regional decision making for sustainable development.

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