Homewood Cluster Planning: **Cluster 1**
Table of Contents

Cluster Planning Overview 3

Cluster 1 Existing Conditions
Existing Conditions 5
Existing Uses 6
Public Ownership 7
Existing Vacancy 8
Existing Zoning 9

Cluster 1 Meeting Summaries
Community Development Principles 10
Meeting 1 11
Meeting 2 15
Meeting 3 18

Cluster 1 Final Plan
Consensus Vision Plan 20
Initiative Plan 22
Phasing Recommendations 23
Cluster Planning Overview

Why Create Another Plan for Homewood?

Change is coming to Homewood. The goal of Homewood Cluster Planning is to guide that change in the interest of Homewood’s residents. The Cluster Planning process will create a detailed land use vision for Homewood’s future based on the needs and desires of existing, present-day community stakeholders.

This process will consider both long- and short-term land use, working with residents in one part of the neighborhood at a time. Building on the neighborhood assets, the process will craft a vision for what should happen to vacant property; what types of development are right for different parts of Homewood; where houses should be renovated, mothballed or demolished and where new ones should be built; as well as where new businesses, industrial uses or parks should be located. After plans for all of the clusters have been developed, they will be brought together into a complete, community-driven plan for the entire Homewood neighborhood.

This process will not resolve all questions regarding how the vision will be implemented. However, it will set goals for ensuring that future development is equitable and addresses the needs of the existing community.

The Cluster Planning Team

Operation Better Block (OBB) was incorporated in 1971 and has worked for successful Neighborhood and Community Development over the last forty years, focusing on the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood. OBB’s mission is to strategize, organize and mobilize residents block-by-block to benefit the Homewood community. The Cluster Planning process is a natural extension of that mission.

Studio for Spatial Practice (SfSP) is an innovative, award-winning design firm with a multi-disciplinary approach to architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and art. SfSP specializes in public realm projects that engage clients and community members in creatively envisioning changes to their environment. SfSP brings experience and local insight to the Cluster Planning process, having recently completed the Bridging the Busway study.
Cluster Planning Overview

How the Homewood Cluster Planning Process Works

After an initial pilot study area was completed for residential blocks adjacent to Faison Elementary, the planning process began in earnest, in January of 2014, with an Introductory Meeting where an overview of the Homewood Cluster Planning process was presented.

As a first step in each cluster, OBB conducts field surveys to collect personal testimonies from residents and parcel-specific data within the target area. OBB shares their up-to-date information with the rest of the planning team and mails postcards summarizing basic statistics about the cluster to every resident. The postcards are a way to share the data that has been collected and encourage participation in upcoming planning meetings.

Three cluster-specific meetings follow, where findings are presented and residents’ input is solicited. OBB staff also go door to door between meetings, following up with residents to share draft planning materials and ask for feedback. Their comments are then incorporated into the planning work. At the third meeting, a Draft Consensus Plan is presented for review and comment.

The resulting Final Consensus Plan is included in a summary report and distributed to area residents. All completed Cluster Plans are eventually brought together into a neighborhood-wide Master Plan. The anticipated time line for completing planning for all cluster areas is the summer / fall of 2015.
Cluster 1 Existing Conditions

**Assets & Challenges**

Cluster 1 is bounded in the northeast by Frankstown Ave. At Curranhill Ave., the boundary turns north and then west just beyond McCombs St. Fifth Ave. forms the western boundary. The M.L.K. Jr. East Busway marks the southwestern edge. The boundary then turns north along Dallas Ave. and east along Formosa Way. N. Murtland St. is Cluster 1’s easternmost edge, rejoining with Frankstown Ave. by Shiloh Community Baptist Church.

Cluster 1 has Multi-Unit Residential, Two-Family Residential, and Urban Industrial zoned areas. A small area within the western industrial edge is zoned for Single-Family Residential, and a limited portion of N. Dallas Avenue is zoned for Local Neighborhood Commercial uses.

Cluster 1 is adjacent to Washington Boulevard, a high-traffic road with several “gateway” access points into Homewood. A potential asset for this cluster is its proximity to investment in Larimer and Bakery Square in East Liberty.

Cluster 1 challenges include working with a large number of vacant properties, delinquent landlords, and several deteriorating properties. Many vacant, dilapidated homes have been demolished in recent years, a practice that continues into the present day. Additionally, railway infrastructure poses a unique challenge, physically separating portions of the neighborhood and creating a green expanse along Homewood’s border with Point Breeze North.

The following pages show existing Cluster 1 conditions relating to land and building uses, public ownership, occupied and vacant properties, and zoning. This key information was presented and made available at community meetings to help educate stakeholders about local conditions and inform discussions about land use planning.
Cluster 1 Existing Uses

Existing Uses

OBB field surveyed the Cluster 1 area to determine the existing uses of buildings and unbuilt land, which are reflected in this diagram. Understanding which lots are being used as sideyards, for parking or as community gardens, for example, will help inform the planning process and action plan.
Cluster 1 Public Ownership

Cluster 1 has a concentration of City of Pittsburgh properties - mainly vacant land - that could provide opportunities for developing new community-supported uses: housing, sideyards, open space, etc.
A significant number of Cluster 1 properties, buildings and land, are vacant. There are both challenges and opportunities associated with large-scale neighborhood vacancy.
Cluster 1 Existing Zoning

Cluster 1 is a mix of multi-family residential, single-family low density, local neighborhood commercial, and urban industrial zoned land.
Community Development Principles

During the Cluster Planning Introductory Meeting, a set of resident-supported community development/planning priorities was drafted to guide the planning process.

The Principles, provided to the right, summarize the community’s expressed development priorities - at the time of this writing.

These Community Development Principles are a work in progress. As new priorities, policies, and practices are recommended during the Cluster Planning sessions, the Principles are modified to accommodate the most current and up-to-date community feedback.

Community Development Principles (June 2014)

COMMUNITY

- Collaboration is key: take into account existing community plans and other neighborhood organizations that are doing good work
- Create relationships and partnerships within the community of Homewood
- Use the process to educate people about what makes a successful neighborhood and community

HOUSING

- People who live in Homewood get to stay here
- If there is relocation, renovate or build new first, and keep people in their community or neighborhood
- Provide a diversity of housing types for families and individuals with different needs, lifestyles and income levels

ECONOMY

- Residents should benefit from jobs resulting from neighborhood revitalization: jobs that are created should be sustainable and not temporary
- Help local business owners sustain and expand their businesses
- Support neighborhood retail by buying local from community-run businesses
- Leverage Urban Industrial zoning areas to the community’s benefit
Cluster 1 Meeting 1

Potential Land Use Types

Illustrated examples of potential land use categories were presented to Meeting 1 participants. These precedent images were used by residents to help them identify appropriate future land uses throughout Cluster 1.
**Cluster 1 Meeting 1**

**Date:** October 7, 2014  
**Location:** Shiloh Community Baptist Church  
**Attendees:** 15

**Goal**
- Identify future land uses for Cluster 1 and consider ideas for the short-term use of vacant land (0-15 years)

**Summary**
- SfSP presented a summary of Existing Conditions and ongoing projects in the Cluster, including: the Wheel Mill and its new parking lot, Mary Savage’s vacant property garden plantings and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy Garden
- SfSP explained key factors that should be considered when making planning recommendations for Cluster 1:
  1. Some blocks are over 30% vacant; and
  2. Building new housing takes time - there is not enough demand to rebuild everything
- Attendees were divided into three groups to review and discuss proposed land use types
- Differing opinions were encouraged

**Follow Up**
- OBB knocked on approximately 160 residents’ doors after Meeting 1 to review what was discussed at the first meeting and invite residents to participate in the process

---

Two Preliminary Cluster 1 land use diagrams were developed by neighborhood residents. Pre-cut pieces of colored foam, matching the legend above, were used to indicate which uses they would like to see in different parts of the cluster. More-detailed handwritten notes were added to provide commentary or suggest ideas or uses that were not listed.
Cluster 1 Meeting 1

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and final report out by smaller groups.

Break Out Activity Group 1:

HOUSING
- Renovate housing along Kelly Street
- Build new housing along Kelly Street; there was consensus that Kelly has a strong band of homeowners, making it a good candidate for additional housing

MIXED USE
- Develop small-scale live-make units along Kelly in the block adjacent to Fifth Avenue

OPEN SPACE
- Create small parks at the corners of Dallas and Kelly Streets, and in the adjacent cluster as potential outdoor seating for Perry’s, a new restaurant located on Frankstown Avenue near Murtland Street.
- Make a trail along the railroad tracks in the adjacent green space
- Create parks with trails, seating and lawn areas along Inwood Street on the vacant land parcels
- Establish an ecological park on Kelly Street, adjacent to Fifth Avenue, to provide a natural amenity that helps with flooding and provides green parking for proposed live-make units

DISCUSSION AND OTHER NOTES
- Retain local businesses and provide them with assistance through this planning process
- As a first priority, offer vacant properties to existing residents for use as sideyards
- Clean up and improve lighting at underpasses
- Provide a small map inset showing the cluster’s physical relationship to the business district
- Observation: a vacant house adjacent to the Dallas Parklet is not maintained and should be demolished
- Rezone the block of Kelly adjacent to Fifth Avenue to allow for mixed-use or urban industrial uses
Cluster 1 Meeting 1

Break Out Activity Group 2:

HOUSING
• Build new infill housing on the large vacant lot on Bennett Street
• Explore limited housing infill on Inwood Street, and on Frankstown Avenue and Kelly Street between LaSchall St. and Dallas Ave.

MIXED USES
• Develop small-scale live-make units at the corner of Dallas Avenue and Kelly Street
• Maintain Urban Industrial areas and work to attract large-scale employment to the Busway edge along Hamilton Ave. and blocks along Washington Blvd. Small, specialty manufacturing and office uses were also discussed.
• Although it was not added to the map, the group discussed the pros and cons of including retail as part of new development along Washington Boulevard

OPEN SPACE
• Create a community garden on Inwood St. on vacant land parcels. Residents indicated that an effort to create a garden was already underway, but they were unsure of the exact parcels.

DISCUSSION AND OTHER NOTES
• Elderly homeowners want to remain in their homes and not be displaced by either development or rising tax assessments; provide assistance to aging homeowners
• Avoid resident displacement as reinvestment occurs in the community, provide tax relief to older homeowners when assessments rise
• The group discussed, generally, what types of new residents and households might move into the neighborhood
• Highlight the importance and history of Homewood as an inclusive neighborhood for families and older residents
• Include a participant representing residents’ interests in decision-making meetings with developers and the public sector; OBB intends to play this role, advocating for the desires and interests of residents that are brought up during the Cluster Planning process

Examples of single-family and multi-unit housing, local neighborhood commercial, and urban industrial buildings
Cluster 1 Meeting 2

Date: October 28, 2014
Location: Shiloh Community Baptist Church
Attendees: 15

Goal
• Evaluate planning options for each sub-area so that a preferred, long-term vision for Cluster 1 can be created

Summary
• Ideas from Meeting 1 were combined to create land use options for the cluster
• Attendees were divided into groups in which options for three Cluster 1 sub-areas were presented and discussed
• Residents identified aspects of the planning scenarios that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red dots
• Participants were encouraged to add notes and comments to elaborate on their preferences, or to suggest ideas that were not shown in the plan drawings

Follow Up
• OBB knocked on approximately 160 residents’ doors after Meeting 2 to review the latest draft planning materials

Cluster 1 was divided into 3 sub-areas for deeper study: Washington Boulevard, Frankstown to Hamilton, and Inwood Street

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a breakout activity and discussion of next steps for planning in Cluster 1. The Cluster Scenarios were broken into 3 areas:

• Washington Boulevard Sub Area: Options included new housing infill with live-make uses, limited residential renovation and infill, and scenarios for either shared parking or a large-scale retail or employment use
• Inwood Street Sub Area: Options focused on lower-density infill housing or creating large open space areas.
• Frankstown to Hamilton Sub Area: Options included creating infill housing at an existing density, building apartment buildings or creating small gardens in vacant lots
Cluster 1 Meeting 2

**Washington Boulevard**

**COMMENTS**

- Unanimous support for neighborhood-serving, large-scale retail in option 2, especially if the use helped to create jobs. A grocery store or mini market was suggested by some residents.
- Some support for providing other neighborhood serving retail uses in this sub area, such as an ice cream parlor, a burger joint, etc.
- No support for the parking lot proposed in Option 1.
- Strong support for the proposed trail along the railway. There was a lot of interest in improving the railroad underpasses as community gateways with greening, signage, lighting and art.
- Concerns raised about proposed renovations on Hamilton Avenue: residents suggested that houses in this area are not worth renovating.

**Inwood Street**

**COMMENTS**

- General support for green residential housing in Option 2
- Concern expressed about proposed green space in Option 1 and Option 2; residents felt strongly that unmonitored green space would attract unwanted activities and result in higher crime rates

Option 1 for Washington Boulevard showed live-make uses and infill with a large green parking lot. Option 2 featured a large neighborhood serving retail or employment use in lieu of a parking lot.

Option 1 for Inwood Street showed a greenspace with trails and gardens. Option 2 did not include the park, but shared residential infill and sideyard proposals, as well as a trail system along the railroad.
Frankstown to Hamilton Option 1

• General support for infill housing at the existing density, as shown in Option 2
• No support for the proposed Wheel Mill parking lot, as illustrated in both options
• No support for proposed open space at the corner of Dallas Avenue and Kelly Street; a community service building/community center, was suggested instead.
• Some support for the small apartment buildings shown in Option 1; integrating small, multi-family apartment buildings (4-6 units) into the neighborhood would help ensure that housing will be available to younger people looking for affordable apartments.
• Some opposition to the proposed apartment buildings; these residents preferred infill at the existing density.

Frankstown to Hamilton Option 2

Discussion and Other Notes:
• Residents indicated a need in the cluster, and the neighborhood at large, for newly constructed housing to be both affordable and designed to serve a variety of households and community members - including seniors, young singles and families.
• Residents also stated that there should be an effort to ensure that neighborhood residents are able to get construction jobs resulting from redevelopment, noting the current effort to expand construction trade oriented job training underway at the 7800 Susquehanna building.

Option 1 for the Frankstown to Hamilton Sub Area showed infill and renovations, as well as multi-family housing and ecological greenspaces. Option 2 highlighted small-scale cottage housing and live-make uses or neighborhood retail.
Cluster 1 Meeting 3

Date: November 18, 2014
Location: Shiloh Community Baptist Church
Attendees: 8

Goal
• Evaluate the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 1, working towards a preferred long-term vision

Summary
• SfSP reviewed the content of Meetings 1 and 2 and presented a Draft Consensus Plan based on the scheme that had previously received the most community support, while also revisiting the community’s interest in providing housing for a range of age groups and income levels.
• Residents identified aspects of the plan that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red dots
• Attendees added notes to indicate specific comments or ideas that were not listed

Follow Up
• Scenarios were combined into a final vision to reflect resident input/feedback and this Cluster 1 report was distributed to all meeting attendees, residents, and property owners

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and discussion of the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 1. The following questions and comments were discussed during the break out session.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q) Is it possible to make Inwood and McCombs into a more formal cul-de-sac design?
A) SfSP added green residential units based on resident consensus along Inwood Street and a trail along the railway but did not propose infrastructure changes

Q) Where is the URA looking to build new housing?
A) The URA is proposing 4 new single-family units between Dallas and Murtland on Kelly Street

Q) Can we focus on occupied homes and what those homeowners will get out of this process?
A) OBB can help through services such as Act 50 and Act 77 property tax reductions as well as working to have homes assessed at a reasonable rate for taxing purposes

Q) What impact will the land bank have on this plan?
A) In the legislation, it states that property disposition must be done in accordance with community plans, so hopefully land banking will benefit the neighborhood

Q) Who will help make the proposed trail along the railway?
A) Reference to the Find the Rivers Campaign in the Hill District was made, and a possible partnership with Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy was suggested
Cluster 1 Meeting 3

GENERAL COMMENTS

• Attendees suggested a wider community effort to bring residents to meetings/information sessions
• A partnership with Veterans Place on Washington Boulevard was considered for future housing and social services
• The Cluster Planning Process should include efforts to help existing residents stay in their homes; people need assistance with renovations and escalating property taxes
• Residents are concerned about rising taxes and the economic implications of new development. Many neighborhood assessments were appealed recently, with the help of OBB, on the grounds that homes were assessed higher than the current value of an average house in Homewood. While the average home in Homewood currently sells for $9,200, the recent assessment process did not include comparable houses sold below $10,000. A large number of the assessment appeals were denied.
• Attendees requested visual resources relating to these issues, including a tax implication diagram and a table showing new construction and renovation costs

Comments: Final Cluster 1 Plan

GREEN DOTS

• No green dots

RED DOTS

• 1 red dot on the infill residential unit on Kelly Street adjacent to the railway; lot owner proposes a live-make use for the property adjacent to the lot she owns
Cluster 1 Consensus Vision Plan

Consensus Plan Key Components

1. Develop infill housing at the current density and scale on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along Frankstown Avenue, Kelly Street, and Bennett Street; assist homeowners who are interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

2. Explore the possibility of providing new diverse housing types, including small apartment buildings, along the eastern edge of the cluster.

3. Provide infill with lower density housing on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along Inwood Street; assist existing homeowners who are interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

4. Provide new ecological open space with a trail system along the railway.

5. Create large-scale neighborhood-serving retail and/or employment uses in the blocks adjacent to Fifth Avenue; provide small-scale mixed-use buildings within these blocks.

6. Enhance gateways to Homewood along Hamilton Avenue, Kelly Street, and Frankstown Avenue while simultaneously improving the streetscape, lighting and landscaping at underpasses.
Cluster 1 Consensus Vision Plan

Long Term Strategy: Replace parking lot on Kelly with infill housing

- Housing infill at existing density
- Renovate existing housing
- New green residential
- Trails / Open Space
- Ecological
- Small scale live-make
- Large scale employment

Infill with single family housing

- Multi-family housing

Infill single family units at lower density

- Renovate existing units

Landscape and lighting improvements at underpasses

- Proposed sideyards

Ecological open space with trail system along railway

Large neighborhood-serving retail or employment use

- Live-make uses or neighborhood serving retail

- Infill with single family housing

- Renovate existing units if viable
Cluster 1 Initiative Plan

- Renovations of existing structures where possible
- Small and large scale live-make uses
- Trail system and railway underpass improvements
- Infill housing at the existing density (+ some sideyards)
- Renovations of existing structures where possible
- Lower density or green residential
Cluster 1 Phasing Recommendations

Current Initiatives

• Wheel Mill and possible new parking lots
• Mary Savage’s Vacant Property Garden Plantings
• Western Pennsylvania Conservancy Garden

Short Term Initiatives

• Promote the City of Pittsburgh Sideyard Sale Program in which homeowners living next to vacant, City-owned land, who are up-to-date on their taxes, can purchase adjacent parcels for a low fee
• Create a Vacant Property Strategy detailing precisely which existing vacant buildings in the cluster area should be: a) renovated in the near future, b) mothballed and preserved as a future rehab project, or c) demolished
• Identify priority infill housing sites along Kelly Street and work with a developer or developers to build new homes

Longer Term Initiatives

• Incorporate a bike and walking trail, stormwater capture, and passive green space with the goal of greening the railway and making larger neighborhood connections
• Encourage a new large-scale neighborhood-serving retail or employment use adjacent to Fifth Avenue on the block between Frankstown Avenue and Kelly Street
• Create gateways to the neighborhood by enhancing the blocks adjacent to Fifth Avenue and the underpasses with updated streetscape, furniture and lighting
Homewood Cluster Planning is a project of Operation Better Block, in collaboration with Studio for Spatial Practice.

For more information please contact at Operation Better Block
801 Homewood Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1444

412.731.1908 (ph)
www.obbinc.org

Photos from the Cluster 1 Planning process