Homewood Cluster Planning: **Cluster 5**
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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 5 **Existing Conditions**

**Assets & Challenges**

Cluster 5 is bounded to the north by Felicia Way and Frankstown Ave. The eastern boundary is Oakwood Street. Hamilton Avenue marks the southern edge, until the boundary turns north for a block along Braddock Avenue, and then continues west along Formosa Way. Zenith Way is the cluster’s western edge.

Cluster 5 has Multi-Unit Residential zoning throughout a majority of the area. The southwestern corner along Kelly Street, the northeastern corner and Brushton Avenue are zoned for Local Neighborhood Commercial. Although most existing uses within the cluster are residential in nature, there are also churches, and some formerly-industrial buildings located along Brushton Avenue, Muti Way and Kelly Street.

Cluster 5 is adjacent to the Business and Institutional Core, which could help to strengthen the cluster. The east-west corridors along Frankstown and Hamilton Avenues are important commuter routes and may also be assets to build upon.

Cluster 5 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.

The following pages show existing Cluster 5 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 5 Existing Uses

OBB field surveyed the Cluster 5 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 5 Public Ownership

Public Ownership
Cluster 5 has a high concentration of City of Pittsburgh properties - mainly vacant land - that could provide opportunities for developing new community-supported uses: housing, sideyards, open space, etc.
Cluster 5 Existing Vacancy

A significant number of Cluster 5 properties, buildings and land, are vacant. There are both challenges and opportunities associated with large-scale neighborhood vacancy.
Cluster 5 Existing Zoning

Cluster 5 is a mix of Multi-Family Residential and Local Neighborhood Commercial zoned land.
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**

**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
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 5.
Cluster 5 Meeting 1

Date: February 4, 2015
Location: Holy Cross Episcopal Church
Attendees: 14

Goal
• Identify future land uses for Cluster 5 and consider ideas for the short-term use of vacant land (0-15 years)

Summary
• OBB introduced its staff members who each presented the program led by the individual
• SfSP presented a summary of Existing Conditions and Land Use
• SfSP explained key factors that should be considered when making planning recommendations for Cluster 5:
  1) some blocks are over 50% vacant; and
  2) building new housing takes time - there is not enough demand to rebuild everything
• Attendees were divided into two groups to review and discuss proposed land use types in detail
• Differing opinions were encouraged

Follow Up
• OBB knocked on approximately 166 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 5 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 5 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 where appropriate
- Build small apartment buildings at the corner of Braddock and Bennett
- Build new single-family homes, at a lower density: on the blocks lining Brushton Avenue, on Bennett Street between Oakwood and Hale, on Bennett Street between Zenith Way and Sterrett Street, and on Kelly Street between Braddock and Brushton Avenues
- Create green housing on Conamaugh Street even though it is not in the cluster

OPEN SPACE
- Create open space associated with Holy Cross Episcopal Church
- Create community gardens in the cluster: a specific site was not identified
- Concern expressed about crime specifically associated with open space

MIXED USE
- Develop a market at the corner of Oakwood and Hamilton and/or on Kelly Street near the Homewood Avenue business district

DISCUSSION & OTHER NOTES
- Concern about churches acquiring property for future development that might not benefit the community
- Attract more people to live in the cluster to support proposed businesses without pricing out the current residents
- Historic photographs of Homewood’s business district were shared: residents mentioned that Homewood used to be more diverse, racially and economically, and noted that it should move back in that direction
- Jerome Jackson, Executive Director with Operation Better Block, suggested that it would be helpful for existing residents and community organizations to buy and be in control of property, to help stabilize the neighborhood
- Convert the school across from the library into a trade school
- Concern about crime rates and vandalism

Photograph of an interactive break-out session conducted as part of Meeting 1
Cluster 5 Meeting 1

Break Out Activity Group 2

HOUSING
• Build new housing at the existing density at the corner of Bennett and Braddock Avenues
• Create lower density infill housing on Kelly Street between Sterrett Street and Braddock Avenue
• Create housing for single parents with attached day care centers

MIXED USES
• Develop retail along Brushton Avenue between Hamilton and Bennett
• Need more community support for the existing retail

OPEN SPACE
• Create community gardens on Bennett Street between Zenith Way and Sterrett Street, and along Kelly Street on the block between Braddock and Brushton Avenues

DISCUSSION & OTHER NOTES
• Add more community-oriented police stations because public safety is an issue
• Concern expressed about seniors being able to afford tax increases as property values rise: create state-wide legislation protecting seniors from such increases
Cluster 5 Meeting 2

Date: February 11, 2015
Location: Holy Cross Episcopal Church
Attendees: 12

Goal
• Evaluate planning options for each sub-area so that a preferred, long-term vision for Cluster 5 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 5 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

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and discussion of next steps for planning in Cluster 5. Two scenarios for the cluster were presented:

• **Scenario 1- Residential Infill:** Create single-family houses at an existing and possibly lower density throughout the cluster. Build small apartment buildings along Braddock Avenue and Bennett Street. Introduce small-scale live/make and neighborhood-serving retail uses along the Brushton Avenue corridor and on Kelly Street next to the Homewood Avenue business district.

• **Scenario 2- Address Park:** Infill the cluster with new, single-family houses at an existing and possibly lower density. Create a network of scattered parks and ecological open spaces throughout the cluster. Establish larger open spaces with amenities adjacent to churches. Develop neighborhood-serving retail on Kelly Street, adjacent to the Homewood Avenue business district, and along Oakwood Street.
Cluster 5 Meeting 2

Scenario 1 - Residential Infill

- Unanimous support for green residential infill and renovations
- Some support for providing small apartment buildings in the cluster
- Strong support for proposed live/make uses along Brushton Avenue
- Some support for neighborhood-serving retail along Oakwood Street
- Some support for creating ecological open space adjacent to Holy Cross Episcopal Church on Kelly St.
- Concern about infill housing on Kelly St. adjacent to the business district: residents feel it better suits businesses
- Some concern about the proposed small apartment buildings if the landlord/owner is delinquent
- Strong concern about crime at the corner of Kelly Street and Braddock Avenue: streetscape improvements (lighting) might help reduce crime
- Correction to mapping: A resident owns the sideyard property on Bennett Street where infill is proposed, and is converting it into a garden
Cluster 5 Meeting 2

Scenario 2 - Address Parks

- Expressed concern for the maintenance and upkeep of proposed green spaces, and asked if the Cluster Association could manage it. There was also concern about the potential for crime in and around green space.
- Suggested adding parking near the Bennett St. church rather than a playground.

COMMENTS

- Strong support for low-density residential infill and renovations where feasible
- Some support for green space adjacent to churches
- Little support for low-density infill housing on Brushton Avenue
- Some concern about the community garden at the corner of Braddock Avenue and Kelly Street

DISCUSSION & OTHER NOTES

- Generally liked the proposed open spaces but worried about who would maintain it and the potential for crime
- Suggested adding a Community Oriented Police Station in the cluster to help deter crime and to help people feel safe enough to walk in the neighborhood or to shop in the business district
- Thought the LNC zoning should be maintained to allow for future market demands
- Suggested making residential infill on major streets a priority
- Felt strongly that a market or a convenience store at one end of the cluster would be a welcome addition to the neighborhood

Scenario 2 - Address Parks
shows new single-family homes at an existing or lower density. A network of scattered parks and ecological open spaces is established throughout the cluster with larger open spaces with amenities located adjacent to institutions. Neighborhood-scale retail is introduced on Kelly Street adjacent to the Homewood Avenue business district and along Oakwood Street.
Cluster 5 Meeting 3

Date: March 4, 2015
Location: Holy Cross Episcopal Church
Attendees: 12

Goal
- Evaluate the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 5, 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 5 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 a discussion of next steps. A Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 5 was presented, featuring:
- Streetscape improvements along Kelly Street and Braddock Avenue
- A network of scattered pocket parks, community gardens and ecological open spaces is distributed throughout the cluster, with larger open spaces with amenities next to Churches
- Neighborhood-serving retail is proposed adjacent to the Homewood Avenue business district on Kelly Street
- Small-scale live/make and apartment buildings line Brushton Avenue, and small apartment buildings are recommended on Bennett Street at Braddock Avenue
- Lower density single-family homes are shown throughout the cluster with some residential infill at the existing density along Oakwood and Bennett Streets
- Renovate existing units where possible

GENERAL COMMENTS
- Concern about safety and crime rates in the cluster: a community-oriented police substation (COPS) should be located in or near the cluster. A storefront located at the intersection of Hamilton and Braddock (formerly the Briar Patch) was suggested as a possible location.
- Residents asked if loans are available to build new construction. OBB will follow-up directly with interested parties. Financial assistance for remodeling may be available to homeowners but not renters.
- One resident suggested growing medical marijuana in the community gardens, as a possible source of income, but also felt that any kind of plant/tree nursery could be lucrative for the community
- Residents expressed concern with absentee landlords and said that small apartment buildings were acceptable only if the management company maintained them
- Residents are interested in learning more about energy-efficient green construction and asked if those techniques would be used for new development in the cluster
- Residents asked if there was a source for tree donations to private residences. OBB will follow up with information.
Break Out Group 1
GREEN DOTS
• Streetscape improvements along Kelly Street and Braddock Avenue
• Support for the existing community garden on Hamilton Avenue
• Playground at Bethesda Presbyterian Church on Bennett Street
RED DOTS
• Green space on the corner of Brushton Avenue and Bennett Street: property owner suggested it become a live/make use instead

Break Out Group 2
GREEN DOTS
• Renovated housing along Bennett Street and low-density infill along Kelly Street
• Open space associated with Holy Cross Episcopal Church
• Apartment buildings on Brushton Avenue and along Bennett Street
RED DOTS
• Proposed infill on Kelly St. should instead become open space next to the church
• Vacant lot along Sterrett Street should become an infill building
• Proposed infill on Bennett Street, between Sterrett and Collier, should become a community garden instead
• Add 2 to 3 infill housing units instead of providing open space on Collier Street
• At the corner of Braddock Avenue and Kelly Street, build infill units at the corner and create a community garden at the block’s interior
• The corner of Frankstown and Oakwood may be more appropriate for a commercial use than for the proposed residential infill
Cluster 5 Consensus Vision Plan

Consensus Plan Key Components

1. Develop new single-family housing at the current density and scale on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along Kelly and Bennett Streets in the eastern part of the cluster. New housing should face onto Sterrett Street. Assist homeowners who are interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

2. Explore the possibility of providing new, diverse housing types, including small apartment buildings, at the corner of Bennett Street and Braddock Avenue and along Brushton Ave. Create small-scale live/make uses along Brushton Avenue.

3. Build new, lower-density houses on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along Kelly and Bennett Streets in the western part of the cluster. Assist existing homeowners who are interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

4. Provide a network of small-scale ecological open spaces and parks throughout the cluster with larger open space adjacent to churches.

5. Create neighborhood-serving retail and/or employment uses on Kelly Street adjacent to the Homewood Avenue business district and at the corner of Frankstown Avenue and Oakwood Street.

6. Enhance Kelly Street and Braddock Avenue by improving the streetscape, lighting and landscaping to provide “eyes on the street” and help reduce crime.
Cluster 5 Consensus Vision Plan

- M.L.K. Jr. East Busway
- Frankstown Avenue
- Hamilton Avenue
- Kelly Street
- Bennett Street
- Felicia Way
- Fleury Way
- Formosa Way
- Oakwood Street
- Hale Street
- Brushton Avenue
- Durango Way
- Newman Way
- Muti Way
- Braddock Avenue
- Collier Street
- Sterrett Street
- Zenith Way

Neighborhood-serving retail adjacent to the Homewood Avenue business district

- Streetscape improvements along Braddock and Kelly
- Ecological green adjacent to church
- Small-scale live/make and mixed-use apartment buildings along Brushton Avenue
- Green residential units with open space adjacent
- New single-family homes at the existing density
- Infill with single family housing at existing density
- Retain LNC zoning for neighborhood-serving retail parcels
- Open space with amenities next to church
- Small apartment buildings on Bennett and Braddock

Renovate existing units where possible

Network of small parks throughout cluster

Housing infill at existing density
Renovate existing housing
New green residential
Trails / Open Space
Ecological
Small-scale live/make
Cluster 5 Initiative Plan

- Renovations of existing structures where possible
- Network of open spaces and parks
- Infill housing at the existing density (+ some sideyards)
- Renovations of existing structures where possible
- Lower density or green residential
- Small and large scale live-make uses
Cluster 5 Phasing Recommendations

Current Initiatives

• Continue tradition of resident managed gardens in this Cluster

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

Longer Term Initiatives

• Explore the possibility of providing new, diverse housing types, including small apartment buildings, at the corner of Bennett Street and Braddock Avenue, and along Brushton Avenue. Create small-scale live/make uses along Brushton Avenue.
• Build new, lower-density, single-family homes on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along Kelly and Bennett Streets in the western part of the cluster.
• Provide a network of small-scale ecological open spaces and parks throughout the cluster, with larger open space immediately adjacent to churches.
• Create neighborhood-serving retail and/or employment uses on Kelly Street adjacent to the Homewood Avenue business district and at the corner of Frankstown Avenue and Oakwood Street.
• Enhance Kelly Street and Braddock Avenue by improving the streetscape, lighting and landscaping to provide more “eyes on the street” and help reduce crime.
Homewood Cluster Planning is a project of Operation Better Block, in collaboration with Studio for Spatial Practice.

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Photos from the Cluster 5 planning process