Homewood Cluster Planning: Cluster 7
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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 Map: Contrasting with past neighborhood-wide planning efforts, the Homewood Cluster Planning process more effectively engages community members by focusing on one part of the neighborhood at a time.
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 7 Existing Conditions

Assets & Challenges

Cluster 7’s northern boundary is an imaginary diagonal line, connecting Stranahan Street to Standard Avenue, and forming the edge between Penn Hills and the City of Pittsburgh. Cluster 7 is bounded to the east and south by Pittsburgh’s East Hills neighborhood. Standard Avenue forms the eastern boundary and Frankstown Avenue marks the southern edge. Brushton Avenue is the cluster’s western edge.

Cluster 7 has Two-Unit Residential Low Density zoning throughout most of its area. The western end of Frankstown Avenue is zoned for Local Neighborhood Commercial, with Park land to the east. A small portion of the cluster, along Baxter Street, is zoned for Multi-Unit Residential. Hilltop, the Housing Authority site, is zoned Residential Planned Unit Development with Park land adjacent.

Cluster 7 is adjacent to businesses along Frankstown Avenue, which could be an asset to the cluster. The east-west Frankstown Avenue corridor is an important commuter route with a lot of through traffic.

Cluster 7 challenges include working with a large number of vacant properties, delinquent landlords, and several deteriorating properties. Many vacant homes have been demolished in recent years. Cluster 7’s hillside topography is a dominant feature and a challenge to future infill and development. Three separate water utilities operate in the area, creating some confusion for property owners. Street infrastructure is also poorly maintained.

The following pages show existing Cluster 7 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 7 Existing Uses

OBB field surveyed the Cluster 7 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 7 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. The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh owns the Hilltop development, located at the northwestern corner of the cluster.
Cluster 7 Existing Vacancy

A significant number of Cluster 7 properties, buildings and land, are vacant. There are both challenges and opportunities associated with large-scale neighborhood vacancy. Much of the vacant land consists of steep, hillside parcels.
Cluster 7 Existing Zoning

Cluster 7 is a mix of Two-Unit Residential Low Density, Multi-Family Residential, Residential Planned Unit Development, Local Neighborhood Commercial, and Park 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 7 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 7.
Cluster 7 Meeting 1

Date: May 27, 2015
Location: Homewood Coliseum
Attendees: 3

Goal
• Identify future land uses for Cluster 7 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 7:
  1) some blocks are over 50% vacant; and
  2) building new housing takes time - there is not enough demand to rebuild everything
• Attendees reviewed and discussed proposed land use types in detail
• Differing opinions were encouraged

Follow Up
• OBB knocked on approximately 208 residents’ doors after Meeting 1 to review what was discussed at the first meeting and invite residents to participate in the process

A preliminary Cluster 7 land use diagram was 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.
A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and a discussion of the next steps for the project.

**Break Out Activity**

**HOUSING**

- Renovate existing housing on streets with strong homeownership.
- Build infill housing at the existing density where the cluster is already strong, in particular, along Blackadore, Stoneville and Silverdale Streets.

**OPEN SPACE**

- Create ecological open spaces to alleviate flooding on steeply-sloped vacant sites.

**DISCUSSION & QUESTIONS**

**Q:** Does what we want to happen in the neighborhood actually matter?

**A:** OBB- We have support from the City of Pittsburgh for adopting this completed plan.

**Q:** Will new development in the cluster push people out?

**A:** OBB- Our guiding Community Development Principles (see p. 10) state that residents who want to stay here, get to stay here. OBB will work to keep residents in the neighborhood especially when development occurs.

**Q:** How did you develop the cluster process?

**A:** OBB- We realized that community-wide meetings would only bring out a limited number of people and we often couldn’t explore the fine-grain details. By dividing the neighborhood into smaller areas, OBB can canvass door to door, personally inviting residents to meetings and investigating problems at a micro-level in each cluster.

**Q:** Do the clusters include the businesses?

**A:** OBB- Yes, the Business & Institutional Core was its own cluster and follows Homewood and Frankstown Avenues. The meetings were well attended.

**Q:** Can we reopen the skating rink at the Coliseum?

**A:** No, the number of users does not offset the annual insurance costs (around $250,000 per year).

**Q:** Can we keep money in Homewood by circulating dollars at businesses in our neighborhood?

**A:** OBB- We need to educate the people of Homewood to support local businesses. By going to Home Depot instead of Saliks we take money away from the community. OBB and SfSP suggested mapping local businesses as part of the final report.

**Q:** What is going to happen to the Sickle Cell Society building?

**A:** Their current plans are unknown.
ADDITIONAL NOTES

- Address loud noise from motorcycles running up and down Brushton Avenue.
- Do not renovate houses along the paper street portion of Hallam Street unless the street is made to be continuous with a paved through-road.
- Crime is brought into Homewood - it does not originate with residents.
- Include as short-term goals: clearing/cleaning all vacant lots and adding trash/recycling cans throughout the cluster.
- Provide basic amenities and small, neighborhood-serving retail not found in the surrounding areas, eg: a mailbox, grocery store and/or pizza shop.
- Provide better bus transportation.
- Educate renters about what is acceptable. 58% of this cluster is renters. Sometimes renters do not care about their property as much as homeowners.
- The Housing Authority property is located on high ground and has some of the best views of Pittsburgh. A developer might see the property as having potential as the next site for expensive East End housing.
- Investigate sub-surface conditions at Brushton and Blackadore Streets. A series of mines fill with water and methane, causing subsidence issues. Rigorous core drill testing should be performed to understand whether the area is suitable for future development.
- Improve streetscapes in this cluster: fix potholes and sidewalks and introduce street furniture and better lighting. WE NEED GARBAGE CANS!
- Recognize that Cluster 7 is well-located: it is minutes from major highways, Monroeville, East Hills, etc.
- Create a new Homewood identity to attract developers.
- Encourage Homewood people to create ideas and take part in conversations, rather than reacting to events and other people’s ideas.
- Keep new infill houses in character with existing houses.
- Address Blackadore issues: No snow plows come all the way up the street, there is major flooding at the Frankstown Avenue intersection, and wildlife is taking over.
Cluster 7 Meeting 2

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and discussion of next steps for planning in Cluster 7. Two scenarios for the cluster were presented.

Scenario 1
- Restore slopes along Frankstown with stormwater management (SWM) techniques.
- Build new, mixed-use infill buildings along Frankstown on vacant LNC-zoned parcels.
- Build new residential infill, to match the existing neighborhood density, along streets with strong home ownership. Target renovations along streets with strong homeownership.
- Decommission streets at the western edge of Cluster 7 and create woodlands and ecological open space.
- Connect Stonedale to Silverdale through vacant lots.

Scenario 2
- Restore slopes along Frankstown with SWM techniques. Create a small garden at the corner of Frankstown and Wheeler.
- Build new infill houses at a lower density along streets with strong home ownership. Renovate houses along streets with strong homeownership.
- Decommission streets at the western edge of Cluster 7 and introduce terraced urban farming.
Cluster 7 Meeting 2

Scenario 1 Comments
• Strong support for renovations along streets with existing strong homeownership
• Some support for providing neighborhood-serving retail uses along Frankstown Avenue
• Some support for connecting Stonedale Street to Silverdale Street with an alley through currently-vacant lots
• General support for stormwater management techniques installed throughout the cluster

Questions
Q: Who maintains hillsides, gardens, and other greenspaces?
A: If a resident uses City-owned vacant land for gardening, a contractual agreement is required to ensure that the lots stay clean.

Q: How can residents clean vacant lots? Most residents do not own the right equipment.
A: Money for equipment rentals is available through the “Love Your Block” grant.
Cluster 7 Meeting 2

Scenario 2 Comments
- Strong support for low-density residential infill and renovations on streets with existing strong homeownership, including Blackadore Street
- Some support for terraced urban farming along Mohler Street
- Support for the parklet proposed at Frankstown and Wheeler

Discussion & Other Notes
- Use stormwater management techniques on the lot at Perchment and Blackadore. OBB and SFSP reported that the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association may have plans for that area. As a short-term goal, clean catch basins in Cluster 7 to improve the performance of local sewer infrastructure.

- Clean and clear the hillside along Blackadore in the short term to see what is there. The vacant lots are currently overgrown and used for illegal dumping.
- Combine Scenarios 1 and 2 for Frankstown Avenue and have retail and apartments in the LNC zone.
- Install wind turbines and solar panels on vacant properties for energy generation, allowing residents to “go off the grid.”
- Create a KaBOOM! playground on the vacant lot at the corner of Perchment and Blackadore.
- Repave Canada Way, Blackadore and Stoneville Streets. Canada Way is deteriorating and Blackadore was only partially resurfaced.
- Distribute trash and recycling cans throughout the cluster.
- Decommission Hallam Street, currently a paper street.
- Consider zoning change from Park to Hillside. Hillside allows for urban farming, gardens, etc... but not residential units.
Cluster 7 Meeting 3

Date: June 24, 2015
Location: Homewood Senior Center
Attendees: 12

Goal
• Evaluate the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 7, 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 7 report was distributed to all meeting attendees, residents, and property owners.

Charlotte Bauman, of Phipps Conservatory, presented the Homegrown Project to the group. Every Homewood resident is eligible for free, raised-bed planters, dirt and seeds at their home. Applications were distributed and are available through OBB. Visit https://phipps.conservatory.org/green-innovation/in-the-community/homegrown for more information.

Michael Hiller, of the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association (NMRWA), presented information about the work they are doing in and around Homewood. The NMRWA is giving away 200 free “Hydra” (slim) rain barrels to Homewood citizens. A stormwater Infiltration feature is being planned for the intersection of Frankstown Avenue and Wheeler, on the vacant corner lot, to help control flooding. Visit www.roshedalerain.com for more information.

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and a discussion about next steps for Cluster 7. The Draft Consensus Plan recommends the following:
• Restore slopes along Frankstown with stormwater management techniques.
• Infill with mixed use and apartment buildings along Frankstown on LNC-zoned parcels.
• Infill at lower density along streets with strong homeownership.
• Renovate along streets with existing strong homeownership.
• Decommission streets at the western edge of the cluster and create terraced urban gardens, woodlands and ecological open spaces.
• Connect Stonedale Street to Silverdale Street through vacant lots.
• Incorporate wind turbines on vacant lots for power generation for the cluster.
• Improve the streetscape along Frankstown. Include benches and trash receptacles at all intersections.

Charlotte Bauman (right) of Phipps’ Homegrown Project and Homewood residents display vegetables from their raised bed gardens. Photo courtesy of Phipps Conservatory.
DISCUSSION & OTHER NOTES

- Flooding is a major issue in this cluster.
- Residents do not want all vacant land to be zoned as Hillside. Some areas could eventually be residential parcels again.
- Residents want to start a petition to clean vacant lots on Blackadore starting with #901 and #903. Neighbors are also concerned about the vacant church lot on Blackadore. OBB will help draft a petition for residents to sign to request clean up action from the City. Whichever lots the City does not clean up, the Junior Green Corps (JGC) will clear later in the summer.
- Residents asked for trash and recycling cans to be distributed throughout the cluster, especially along Frankstown Avenue.
- Connect Hallam Street to Ferndale Street to make the parcels viable for future development.
- Use vacant parking lots along Frankstown to relieve some on-street parking pressure.
- Start a 311 blitz to request that vacant lots be cleaned up and that Blackadore be repaved. OBB offered to draft a flier.
- Clean and clear the Wheeler Street slope.

Q: Who will maintain the green space as proposed on the plan?
A: Cluster Associations may have to organize clean up days. The JGC may also be available to help.

Michael Hiller of NMRWA explains that 200 free rain barrels are available for Homewood residents.
Cluster 7 Consensus Vision Plan

Consensus Plan Key Components

1. Develop new single-family housing to match the current density and scale on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along Baxter Street in the western part of the cluster. Assist homeowners who are interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

2. Build new, lower-density houses on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along streets with strong homeownership in the cluster. Assist existing homeowners who are interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

3. Provide a network of small-scale ecological open spaces, urban farms, community gardens and parks throughout the cluster to assist in stormwater runoff mitigation. Decommission streets in the western part of Cluster 7 where vacancy is greatest: reforest the lots.

4. Clean and clear vacant lots on steeply-sloped hillside.

5. Create a mix of neighborhood-serving retail and small-scale apartment buildings along Frankstown Avenue.

6. Enhance Frankstown Avenue. Improve the streetscape with benches and trash/recycling receptacles at intersections.

7. Clean and reforest slopes along Frankstown Avenue. Consider changing the zoning of steep, vacant parcels to Hillside from current Park use.

8. Provide hillside wind turbines for green power generation.
Cluster 7 Consensus Vision Plan

- **Control stormwater at ends of blocks with ecological open space**
- **Restore woodlands on steeply sloped vacant lots**
- **Wind turbine/solar panel field for cluster energy generation**
- **Connect Stoneville to Silverdale with sloped street**
- **Renovate units on streets with strong homeownership**
- **Repave Blackadore Street, Stoneville Street and Canada Way**
- **Restore slopes along Frankstown with stormwater management techniques at top/bottom of slopes**
- **Decommission streets and create woodlands/ecological open space**
- **Terraced community gardens or urban farm**
- **Infill with residential units at a lower density on streets with strong homeownership**
- **Stormwater management intervention to reduce flooding**
- **Improve Frankstown Avenue streetscape with benches and trash/recycling receptacles**
- **Infill along Frankstown with mixed-use buildings and apartment buildings**
- **Restore slopes along Frankstown with stormwater management techniques at top/bottom of slopes**
- **Housing infill at existing density**
- **Renovate existing housing**
- **New green residential**
- **Trails/Open Space**
- **Ecological**
- **Neighborhood serving retail**
Cluster 7 Initiative Plan

Neighborhood-serving retail uses

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

Neighborhood-serving retail uses
Cluster 7 Phasing Recommendations

Current Initiatives

• Continue 311 blitz for repaving Canada Way, Blackadore Street, and Stoneville Street
• Coordinate with Junior Green Corps to clean up vacant lots 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 and neighborhood-serving retail uses along Frankstown Avenue.
• Build new, lower-density, single-family homes on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties along streets with strong homeownership.
• Provide a network of small-scale ecological open spaces, urban farms, community gardens and parks throughout the cluster. Decommission streets with high vacancies in the western portion of the cluster.
• Enhance Frankstown Avenue. Improve the streetscape with benches and trash/recycling receptacles at intersections.
• Create a wind turbine field on vacant lots for green power generation.
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 7 planning process