

Municipality of Penn Hills 2015 Comprehensive Plan



DRAFT

Preliminary Jan 2014

The following is a draft prepared by the Penn Hills Planning Department. It has yet to be adopted or approved by the Penn Hills Planning Commission and/or the Penn Hills Mayor and Council and is subject to change. Public comments and suggestions to the Penn Hills Planning Department are welcome.

Comprehensive Plan Code Enforcement

Every community needs a code enforcement department. Some gated communities get by with deed covenants and maintenance agreements, but even they need a committee for the occasional tough case. Residents in every type of home want to protect their investments and their property value. Here in Penn Hills the single family home is the tax base and the need to protect the value of the home and good code enforcement becomes an economic issue.

The Penn Hills Department of Code Enforcement is budgeted for six employees: a Director, an Enforcement Officer/Crew Leader with some supervisory responsibilities, three other Inspectors, and a secretary. They are currently not fully staffed due to pending litigation but we expect them to return to this level in the near future. The inspectors report to the Code Enforcement Director who in turn reports to the Penn Hills Manager. The 2014 Municipal Budget brought a new or revised position, a Fire Marshall/Chief Code Inspector, who will assume duties in both categories. The position has yet to be advertised and a detailed job description has yet to be provided. Nonetheless, citizens who lobbied for more code enforcement are hoping for a strong relationship and much support for the Code Enforcement Department.

The Department is responsible for the issuance of building permits, occupancy permits, grading permits, street opening permits, and a variety of other minor permits. They provide inspection service for all of these permits. They also have duties for water meter readings, some sewer inspection work, and inspections for loans under the Community Development Program. They are responsible for zoning complaints, junk cars, high grass, rubbish and debris, dumping, signs, and citizen complaints of a wide variety. They have their hands full.

The Director of Code Enforcement and the Inspectors develop and amend code enforcement priority lists on a daily basis. Some code issues are predetermined i.e. occupancy permit inspections are scheduled well in advance. Building permit inspection times are fairly well established. Court dates are set far in advance.



Feb 2014 Draft

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Housing

Penn Hills Comprehensive Plan

Penn Hills is a great place to live. We have over 17,000 dwelling units in a variety of settings and in a wide range of price ranges. We have a healthy mix of single family homes, townhouses, garden apartments, and hi-rises. They provide shelter to a wide variety of families from all income and size categories. Penn Hills, while predominantly a bedroom community consisting of single family homes, also has hi-rises for the elderly, public housing, group homes, and a millionaire's mansion.

Most of us (85%) live in a single family home of 5-7 rooms (71%) that was built between 1940 and 1970 (69%). Over 25% of us moved here before 1969, and over 70% before 1995. Our homes are valued at between \$50,000 and \$150,000 (84%). Sixty Two percent of us have a mortgage, and we pay between \$700 and \$1500 per month. Over 70% of us pay less than 25% of our income for our housing. We represent the best of middle class America and we're proud of who we are.

Our homes are old and small by today's standards, but they are affordable and, for the most part, well maintained. Collectively they represent what we are all about – our homes are both our shelter and our tax base. For this reason we have concern at many levels. We need to keep our homes in good condition in order to maintain a sound tax base for the community. We need to maintain housing rehab programs to help low and moderate



income families keep up with maintenance problems. We need to help senior homeowners to stay in their homes and to be safe. And we need a healthy mix of remodeling, additions, and new construction.

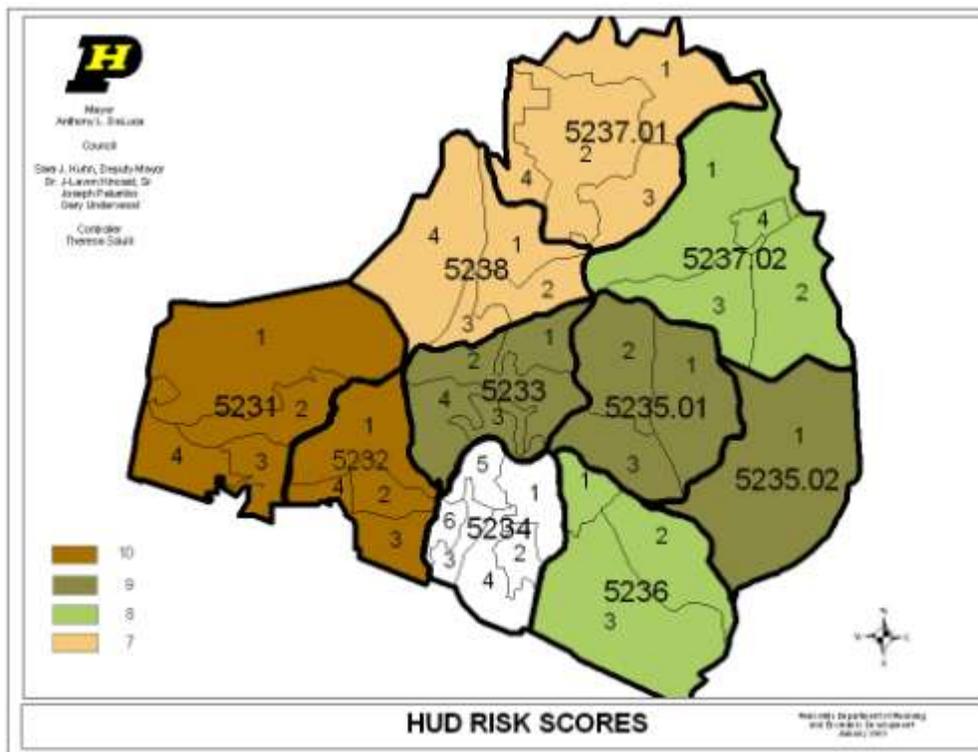
Over 50% of householders have resided in their current Penn Hills home for more than ten years which is a stable housing occupancy rate. But the median family income of \$55,254 is less than the County average of \$84,200. When we combine families on lower incomes with older housing we develop concern for long term maintenance. On the other hand when we compare our median family income to the median sales price of a home we are one of the most affordable housing markets in the country. The median mortgage in 2000 was \$879/month and the median rent for 2000 was \$559/month. This affordability continues to make Penn Hills an attractive place to live.

The Current Foreclosure Crisis

As we update this housing element of the Comprehensive Plan we are recovering from a recent national mortgage foreclosure crisis. The affects are national in scope and potential remedies are currently under debate in Washington. Here in Allegheny County residents are somewhat relieved to find lower rates in foreclosure and, of course, continuing affordability. As we focus on Penn Hills, however, we find a need for serious concern.

Penn Hills has a tremendous need as a result of the recent housing crisis. We refer all readers to the Penn Hills Consolidated Plan (Appendix ___)for an analysis of our housing needs and we adopt by reference the Neighborhood Stabilization Program Substantial Amendment prepared by the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development. We propose to also adopt and conform to the Pennsylvania State Consolidated Plan Amendment 2004-08 Action Plan for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

The Municipality of Penn Hills is one of the hardest hit communities in Allegheny County. The following table and map illustrate the census block groups with the greatest need. HUD has required that activities be concentrated in block groups with risk scores of six or higher. We propose to concentrate NSP activities in block groups which all have a score of 7 or higher. Over 90% of our community qualifies and meets the threshold. Nine out of ten census tracts have risk scores over seven. Five of our ten census tracts have a score of nine or ten.



The County NSP Amendment further analyses areas of greatest need and in 2007 clearly identified Penn Hills as one of these areas with over 12% of its housing units undergoing foreclosure procedures.

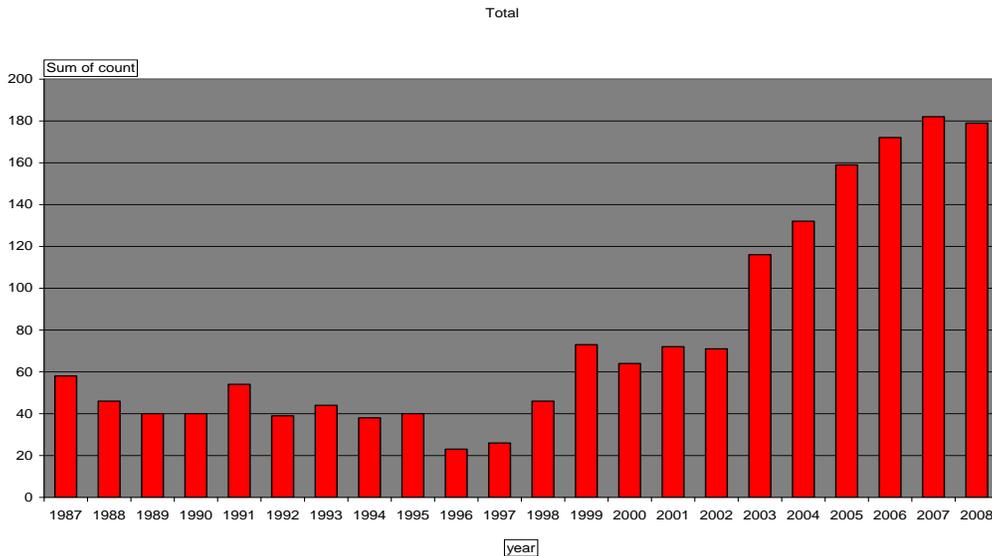


Foreclosures in Penn Hills

The data that Penn Hills has received from Real Stats on foreclosures in Penn Hills shows an upward trend on the number of foreclosures from 2003 to the present with the number of foreclosures in 2003 at 116 to 179 in 2008. The 2008 foreclosure data is for January 1 – November 28 and it is projected that this data will increase when December foreclosure data is incorporated into the chart. The chart below shows the number of foreclosures in Penn Hills from 1987 to the present.

| year | Total |
|-------------|-------|
| 1987 | 58 |
| 1988 | 46 |
| 1989 | 40 |
| 1990 | 40 |
| 1991 | 54 |
| 1992 | 39 |
| 1993 | 44 |
| 1994 | 38 |
| 1995 | 40 |
| 1996 | 23 |
| 1997 | 26 |
| 1998 | 46 |
| 1999 | 73 |
| 2000 | 64 |
| 2001 | 72 |
| 2002 | 71 |
| 2003 | 116 |
| 2004 | 132 |
| 2005 | 159 |
| 2006 | 172 |
| 2007 | 182 |
| 2008 | 179 |
| Grand Total | 1714 |

Foreclosures In Penn Hills



According to HUD risk scores, Penn Hills is at a greater risk for foreclosures and abandonment than other areas in Allegheny County and Penn Hills has the second highest foreclosure rate in Allegheny County. All of Penn Hills census tracts are rated above 7 with 10 being the greatest risk for foreclosures and abandonment with 2/3 of the property owners in Penn Hills having a rating of 6 -7, 1/6 having a rating of 8-9 and 1/6 having a risk of 10. Allegheny County noted in their Neighborhood Stabilization Plan that 78% of all municipalities in the county had at least one or more census tracts with a risk of 5 or more, all census tracts in Penn Hills have a rating of 7 or more. Allegheny County Economic Development has determined that their Neighborhood Stabilization Plan target areas will be comprised of two areas of focus, priority areas and eligible areas. Priority areas are those areas with a foreclosure risk score of 8 or above and an eligible area with a foreclosure risk score of 5 – 7. Because of Penn Hills higher risk score, we will be focusing on properties in the census tracts with a score of 7, 8, 9 or 10. We have received a list of properties from Real Stats and will prioritize them according to census tract and risk score.

With this information the Municipality of Penn Hills Council authorized an application for funding under the newly created Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and we sought newly developed resources as well to react to these problems. Amazingly, Penn Hills has yet to receive funding under this NSP Program. In the long run, just as all of America remains optimistic, we expect to work our way out of this foreclosure problem and we will continue to seek ways to improve our housing stock.

New Housing

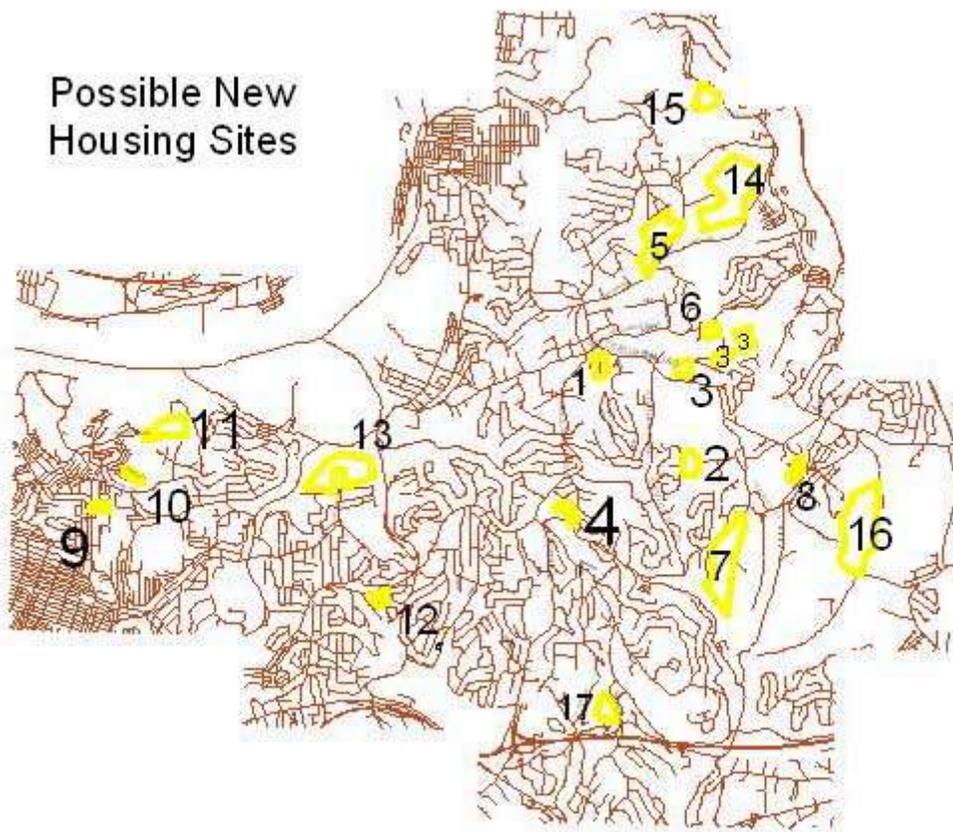
Some communities look upon new suburban housing as a negative, something to be avoided while leaning to redevelopment. Residents in Penn Hills generally look upon the construction of new housing as an asset to the community. They see new families, usually younger families, moving into the community and contributing to improved wealth and stability. Both County and local planners see new housing as a partner to redevelopment and rehabilitation and consider the development of new housing on infill sites to be an important part of quality development strategy.



We welcome quality new housing of all types. A healthy mix of single family homes, townhouses, and garden apartment buildings is encouraged. We will not, on the other hand, encourage an increase in the percentage of Section 8 and or other family subsidized rental units in Penn Hills. Penn Hills has been somewhat impacted by the number of subsidized units and more market housing is needed to provide a healthy mix.

We encourage developers to consider the development of homes in the \$250,000 plus category. Some of our own Penn Hills families have grown both in numbers and family income and now seek to move from the \$80,000-\$100,000 homes into something better. We currently have few opportunities for these families who want to remain in the Penn Hills community. Homes for sale in this income category are scarce yet we have some remaining vacant land that could accommodate this type of new development.

There are opportunities in Penn Hills to assemble quality new housing sites and these have been identified by the following map:



Each of these sites has its own positive and negative qualities but generally we feel they are some of our best opportunities for new housing. The Planning Department is prepared to distribute information on these sites and any other properties of interest to potential developers. A quick summary of these sites is as follows:

Potential New Housing Sites

1. **Burla Inc.** – Near the old library, off of Aster Drive. At one time the owner (Paul Lagrotteria) wanted to develop the property himself. Zoned R5, low assessment.
2. **Ferdinand Palombo** – Off of Black Oak Drive or Hamilton, not the best access but a nice site. Zoned R1, good site for senior townhouses.
3. **Alcoma Apts LP** – This is the site known as Alcoma-On-The-Green, it presently has two garden apartment buildings on a very large site. There is room for many more units. Zoned R1 with a previously approved conditional use for multi-family.

4. **Pivirotto Property** – Off of Universal near #7 VFD. This is a tough site due to topography, but walking distance to the Senior Citizens Center and the Shopping Center. Zoned R1.
5. **Fisher Property** – A great site for new housing. 55 acres, low assessment. Zoned R1. Off of Hulton Road, near Indiana. Not inexpensive.
6. **Pampena Property** – Leechburg Road frontage. A good site for commercial but it may also work for housing. Zoned B2. Previously the owner has asked for \$500,000 for the property.
7. **Cement Plant Property** – Off of Universal and Thompson Run. This is part of a 200 acre parcel. Buildings are currently being demolished to prepare for redevelopment. Potential site for large development.
8. **Mt. Ararat Property** – This property was recently purchased for a church, but more recently the land has become available for housing or other development. This is a potential site for new housing. Zoned R1.
9. **East Lemington Site** – This is a potential site in Lincoln Park for new housing. It needs the support of local and county government in terms of packaging, subsidies, and code enforcement. Multiple owners. Zoned R2.
10. **Santiago Street Site** – The same as the East Lemington Site – a potential site for new housing in Lincoln Park, but one that depends on packaging multiple owners, code enforcement, and subsidies.
11. **KC Ventures** – Off of Lincoln Road near the Penn Hills Multi-Purpose Center. This property was previously approved for 60 units of senior housing but the developer was not funded. New attempts are likely.
12. **Chirieleison Property** – This is a nice home on 10 acres of land. The possibility of acquiring and developing this land has, to our knowledge, yet to be explored. This could be a site good for senior housing. Zoned R1.
13. **McCutcheon Property** – This is a wonderful piece of property with access problems. It sits at the end of McCutcheon Lane, a narrow local street. Otherwise the large undeveloped property would make a nice new housing site. Zoned R1.
14. **Chilton Property** – This is a very large parcel with potential, but only on a large scale. The expense of assembling property and extending a sanitary sewer requires a large number of units. There has been some interest from developers. The Planning Department has designated this as the best site for new upscale single family homes. Zoned R1.
15. **N&G Partnership – Hulton Road site.** This is a site currently zoned for multi-family and borders two existing multi-family developments. It is somewhat remote from services and more suited to family garden apartment units. Zoned R5.
16. **Allegheny Specialty Property** – This is a very large parcel at the Plum Borough line currently zoned R5. It requires utility extension and therefore a large number of new units. The new Walmart development and new construction in the adjacent Plum Borough could stimulate interest. Low assessment.
17. **N&G Partnership – Jefferson Heights Rd. Site.** -This site has utility issues by not being served by sanitary sewers. It could be developed if a sewer extension to Lougeay Road would be feasible. The surrounding single family homes are currently on septic systems. Possible site for senior housing. Zoned R1.

Rehabilitation Programs

The Penn Hills Department of Planning and Economic Development currently offers two housing programs. We have a housing rehabilitation program that will provide up to \$15,000 for home improvements at either 0% or 6% interest depending upon family income. We have another program for low income senior citizens that will provide a grant of \$1000 for any item that corrects a code violation, increases safety, or otherwise helps the senior to continue to live independently. Neither of these programs provides a solution to our problems. The loan program is underfunded and the \$15,000 cap is too low. The \$1,000 grant is only a small offering for a greater need. Nonetheless Council is limited in budgeting to the federal resources that are available. Current potential resources are:

- The Penn Hills CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program
- The Penn Hills Senior Aide Program
- HOME
- NSP Program
- Private Lending Institutions

The HOME program is funded with federal money channeled through a housing consortium that includes Penn Hills, McKeesport, and Allegheny County. Penn Hills has thus far authorized these funds for both rehabilitation and new senior housing. We also participated in a regional project utilizing our HOME funds in the City of Pittsburgh adjacent to our boundary line and the Eastgate Shopping Center. The City's Telesis



project improved the housing in the abutting East Hills neighborhood and set the stage for new commercial development at Eastgate. Current HOME policies were adopted by Council in 1999 and remain in effect. They emphasize the rehabilitation of existing multi-family housing and support for low income neighborhoods in need of redevelopment.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) was new in 2009. Yet in spite of the fact that Penn Hills qualified as one of the most needy communities the state failed to approve a local application. We propose now to lobby Allegheny County Economic Development to acquire homes from mortgage companies, remodel the homes, and offer them for sale to qualifying families. We know that additional programs to meet

Housing Rehabilitation Loans



The Municipality of Penn Hills offers low interest home improvement loans to qualifying low and moderate income Penn Hills homeowners. Owners must simply provide proof of income and ownership. Our Housing Coordinator is ready to help you submit an application. Please call 412-795-2150 at the Penn Hills Department of Planning and Economic Development.

Borrow up to \$15,000

We also have small grants up to \$1,000 for qualifying senior citizens who have health and safety problems with their homes.

These programs are approved by the Penn Hills Mayor and Council through the Penn Hills Community Development Program. For more information call 412-795-2150.

the foreclosure crisis are being developed as this plan is underway. We expect to monitor the situation and apply for appropriate funding when it becomes available.

Another way to rehab our homes and protect the tax base is through code enforcement programs. Penn Hills has a good occupancy permit program and a strong relationship with local realtors who know that this is an enforced ordinance. We also plan a stepped up property maintenance program and we have dedicated a whole section of this plan to Code Enforcement. Please read the Code Enforcement section for more details.

We have already emphasized that a Penn Hills priority will be to keep the housing stock in good condition – that the single family home is our tax base. We need to seek ways to increase opportunities for home remodeling and expansion. Many of our homes are small compared to new housing in today's market. We need to encourage families to expand their existing homes rather than seek to sell and relocate.

Fair Housing and Affordability

Penn Hills completed and submitted to HUD an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in May of 2008. The study was prepared by Urban Design Ventures in accordance with HUD requirements and regulations (Appendix ____). The study, to no ones surprise, essentially gave Penn Hills a clean bill of health in regard to fair housing. A similar previous study reached a conclusion that Penn Hills had no impediments to fair housing. This study pointed out that we could make some improvements in handicapped accessibility and community awareness. It recommended that we strive to continue to maintain a supply of decent, safe, affordable housing targeted to low income households both renters and owners. This Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice study is available in the Penn Hills Planning Department for those interested in the details of the analysis. The recommendations are incorporated as part of this comprehensive plan.

In regard to affordability Penn Hills again stands as a shining example. In 2007 Money Magazine placed Penn Hills on the list as one of the top ten most affordable towns in the country. Brentwood and West Mifflin also made the list. With our median household income of \$55,254 and median home price of \$84,915 there seemed to be no reason why anyone with a steady job could not purchase a home. Affordable housing may be a nationwide issue but it is not a Penn Hills issue.



Our affordability may in fact give us pause and lead us to work in other areas. For example, we need to encourage developers to build homes of higher quality to create a market for higher income families. And we need to convince State and County officials

that we have more than our share of low income housing and that we need to ask other communities to accept a fair share of low income housing before we allow more in Penn Hills.

Housing Policies:

Considering our bedroom community status and our affordability, what are our goals and objectives? What do we seek for improvements over the next 20 years and what do we need to do? We propose the following not necessarily in order of importance:

- 1. Encourage new housing construction in Lincoln Park with the use of HOME funds, NSP funds and/or other local, state, and federal resources.** The housing in Lincoln Park is some of the oldest in Penn Hills. Sections of this community are also the highest concentrations of Afro-Americans and low income residents. Neighborhood based organizations have cried out for assistance and are asking government officials to develop programs for new housing in an effort to rejuvenate the neighborhood. They want affordable housing and they want new single family homes. The Planning Department should work with the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development on a possible pilot project. Over the years the Municipality has demolished many homes in Lincoln Park and thus vacant land for new infill opportunities exists. If these properties are packaged and combined with programs to provide subsidies, new housing might be possible. Penn Hills Council has adopted a local LERTA Program to provide tax incentives for new housing west of Verona Road (see Econ. Dev. Element). We propose to continue these efforts.
- 2. Encourage larger new homes on larger lots where appropriate. We feel there is a market for a more upscale home in Penn Hills for growing families who need to expand but want to stay in our community.** Families currently living in the \$80,000 home that are growing and becoming more successful are looking to move up to a larger and more attractive home in the \$200-250,000 range. There are currently limited choices for homes in Penn Hills in this price range. We propose to promote this type of new development whenever possible.
- 3. Step up code enforcement activity on a town-wide basis. Rigorously enforce the property maintenance codes. Rid the town of junk cars and debris.** Property maintenance is paramount in Penn Hills. The heart and soul of our tax base rests with the revenue we get from our homes. The value of a homeowner's investment may rise or fall with the maintenance policies of his/her neighbor. We need to protect our tax base and protect our investments as well as protect the health and safety of housing occupants. Code Enforcement must be provided with the necessary resources and the mandate to perform. This Comprehensive Plan has set aside a complete chapter on Code Enforcement and we refer the reader to that section for more information.

4. Continue to operate the community development low interest loan program.

Most recently the Penn Hills Planning Department has assumed primary responsibility for operating this program. This occurred as an effort to assist the Dept of Code Enforcement while they are currently understaffed. As the Dept of Code Enforcement regains full staffing this obligation should revert back to Code in order to free up more time for the Planning Department to pursue other economic development issues.



5. Expand, when possible, both the regular loan program the Senior Aide Program.

For more than 30 years the Municipality has operated a low interest loan program with federal funding through the Community Development Program. More recently we expanded this program to include small grants to seniors to help them continue to remain in their homes and be safe. We recommend that these programs be continued and expanded to include help for the handicapped in rental units.

6. Advertise and enforce the local ordinances against discrimination.

We direct the reader to our “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice” for details and much more information on fair housing. The Municipality takes pride in having a current fair housing ordinance in place and we stand ready to enforce all provisions of this ordinance. We are generally free of any major impediment to fair housing in Penn Hills and we plan to remain proactive in this area. We currently partially fund the Fair Housing Hotline in Allegheny County and we propose to continue this activity.

6. Continue participation in County and regional efforts to combat homelessness.

The Municipality of Penn Hills collaborates with Allegheny County, the City of McKeesport and the City of Pittsburgh, homeless service providers, public housing authorities, health organizations, public safety and other organizations known as the Continuum of Care. The Allegheny County Department of Human Services, (DHS) is the lead agency that administers and monitors the programs that address the homeless population in Allegheny County. This system assists homeless individuals and families with the difficult task of transitioning from living on the streets to living independently in permanent housing. Services include housing placement, health care, employment programs and supportive counseling services. Grant funds for the homeless programs are available through the HUD, the PA Department of Public Welfare Homeless Assistance Program, (HAP) and the Emergency Shelter Grant program all administered by DHS.

DHS collects the data for Allegheny County on the number of homeless

individuals and families. The information is currently available in a computerized database through the Homeless Information Management System, (HMIS). With this program providers are able to determine the number of homeless in Allegheny County. Generally when a Penn Hills individual or family becomes homeless, they leave Penn Hills and seek assistance from providers throughout Allegheny County. Data from 2003 reported that approximately 50 individuals whose last known address was in Penn Hills received assistance from homeless providers.

Allegheny County is in the process of implementing a ten year plan to end chronic homelessness. This process began in 2004 when a federal mandate was adopted and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness advised all communities across the United States to implement a ten year plan to end chronic homelessness. The Homeless Advisory board was also recently formed to assist Allegheny County, the City of McKeesport, the City of Pittsburgh and Penn Hills in implementing and reviewing the many programs, policies and objectives in Allegheny County's plan to end homelessness by 2015. Penn Hills staff will continue to work closely with DHS throughout this process.

Additional information on homeless programs is available in the Penn Hills Planning Department. This information is also available at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Community Services or online at their website: <http://www.alleghenycounty.us.dhs/ocs.aspx>.

- 7. Support the efforts of group home agencies as an effort to care for the physically and mentally handicapped. Rigorously abide by the federal fair housing laws.** Several years ago Penn Hills became the shining example of cooperation between government and agencies that cared for the mentally and physically handicapped. We drafted ordinances to facilitate approvals for group homes and we assisted these agencies in educating the residents of Penn Hills. Now today these ordinances are obsolete and we took the lead in enforcing the Federal Fair Housing Act. We plan to continue to support these agencies in their efforts and we plan to continue to abide by the Fair Housing Act.
- 8. Encourage HUD and the County to minimize new Section 8 housing in Penn Hills. It is our position that Penn Hills has a disproportionate share of Section 8 housing in Allegheny County and this population needs to be decentralized.** Currently, neither the Penn Hills Planning Department nor any other local government agency has authority on what housing units will come under the Section 8 program. Local governing body approvals are not necessary. It is clear, however, that Penn Hills has reached a point where we have more than our fair share of Section 8 units within the boundaries of Penn Hills and we want to develop new policies. We propose to lobby the County and Federal governments to develop policies that more fairly disburse the Section 8 population. It has become evident that a high concentration of Section 8 units in

any one neighborhood brings with it the problems that are associated with poverty and unemployment. The same applies at the community level. We propose to ask that federal subsidies be designed to disburse the housing on a more equitable basis.

9. Promote the construction of new senior citizen housing in multiple locations in Penn Hills. Attempt to attract quality developers accustomed to working with HOME, PHFA, and tax incentive programs that finance this type of development.

As our population ages the need for senior housing continues to grow. Every senior development in Penn Hills has a long waiting list and we have no reason to not expect the trend to continue. We have identified and mapped what we feel are the best possible sites in Penn Hills for this type of housing and we plan to encourage new development of this type.



10. Encourage and Support the Local Private Housing Developers. The “flippers” are our friends. Wherever possible provide assistance and encouragement to businesses involved in local housing rehabilitation. The Planning Department currently maintains a list of “problem” properties, usually vacant houses that are in need of repair but not listed on the real estate market. Continue to maintain and improve this list and work with both Code Enforcement and the local housing providers toward rehabilitating these structures before they become candidates for demolition. Post this list on the Municipal web page and distribute it to any interested party.

11. Utilize a Proactive Sheriff Sale Policy. The Planning Department is currently meeting with the Municipality’s tax collectors to discuss sheriff sale policies. We propose to develop a program to improve the flow of information between Code Enforcement, the Council, and our tax collection agencies that would streamline the sheriff sale process when it is to the community’s advantage. We propose to focus the sheriff sale process on properties that we know that are of interest to local housing rehabilitation companies. The Penn Hills Council has already expressed a willingness to forgive taxes for properties that might otherwise become demolitions. We need to formalize this program and create a process for smart sheriff sales.

12. Encourage CDC’s to undertake Housing Rehab Projects. The Penn Hills CDC is currently flourishing with new membership and growth. Work with this CDC and enable them to undertake a housing project. Provide Penn Hills CDBG funds, HOME funds, or other assistance when appropriate. The Planning Department is currently meeting with the CDC’s Housing Committee. Under discussion is this very



Comprehensive Plan as well as possible future projects for the CDC. The Planning Department should partner with the CDC when appropriate. Work toward programs designed to improve the existing housing stock or that develop new housing in areas of need.

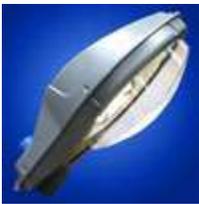
Related Documents:

1. *The Penn Hills Five Year Consolidated Plan Year 37 Action Plan and CDBG Program, Jan 2013*
2. *The Penn Hills Analysis of Impediments To Fair Housing, 2008*
3. *Penn Hills Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report, May 2011*
4. *Penn Hills NSP Program, Jan 2009*

Penn Hills Goes Green

The residents of Penn Hills care as much about the environment as any other American community and we too want to be in the front row with smart technology and innovation. So how do we get on board at the local level? What can local government do to encourage the utilization of best practices and new technology? How can we best conserve our current resources and minimize our energy demands? Penn Hills residents have already learned that they can reduce their sewage bills by controlling their use of water. How can we expand on this way of thinking and reduce our energy demands or improve the environment?

Certain real opportunities are currently in front of us. The federal government has provided funding through the Department of Energy for Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants. Penn Hills in 2010 and 2011 received approximately \$182,000. We completed an energy management plan that will be attached as an appendix to this plan and we will continue to look for Dept. of Energy funding opportunities. Other funds will become available to Penn Hills homeowners through the Weatherization Program and similar initiatives. We need to develop and implement the strategy and prepare the community for full benefits.



The Municipality engaged the services of Envinity Inc., energy consultants based in State College, Pa. The consultants have identified the best possibilities for municipal improvements designed to save energy and lower emissions and their report has been submitted to the federal government as part of the grant process. The Penn Hills Council has discussed and generally approved the strategy. The following projects were completed in 2012:

1. Replaced lighting fixtures in the Municipal Building, the Senior Service Center, and the Wm. McKinley Citizen's Center at a cost of approximately \$37,500 and an annual payback of \$17,200. The investment payback will be two years.
2. Replaced two boilers and thermostats in the Municipal Building. The estimated cost is \$88,000 and the energy savings would be \$4,400 a year. The payback is 15 years but the current boilers were unreliable and needed to be replaced regardless of costs.
3. Replaced bulbs in traffic signals at ten intersections. The estimated cost is \$67,800 with a savings of \$17,000 and a 3.8 year payback.
4. Replaced a motor and a pump for the Water Pollution Control Department.

If funds are remaining from the grant, undertake other miscellaneous energy saving measures at the Municipal Building.

The Strategic Energy Management Plan is incorporated as Appendix ____. This plan includes many additional recommendations for all municipal-owned buildings. We

propose to pursue all of these recommendations and both save energy costs and reduce emissions.

With this in mind let's consider a list of goals and objectives or action steps that could or should be part of either short or long term plans in Penn Hills as follows:

Municipal-Owned Buildings –

1. **Conduct an energy audit** of every municipally owned building in Penn Hills. Propose improvements that would reduce energy demand and generate savings. Look for the potential of employing new technology to reduce fossil fuel emissions or otherwise protect public resources. Begin with the recommendations by Envinity and expand activity based upon available funding.

2. **Encourage Leed construction standards for new public buildings and renovations to existing public buildings.** Devote a percentage of construction and maintenance budgets to green technology. Utilize smart and energy efficient components.

3. **Plan for reduced energy demand.** Ask each Department Director and those responsible for building maintenance and HVAC systems to prepare an energy savings plan for their department that would reduce energy demand.

4. **Grants for Non-Profit Organizations** – Consider authorizing grants to our VFD's, the Lincoln Park Community Center, Shining Arrow, the YMCA, the Service Association, and other non-profit organizations in the community for energy saving audits and improvements.

5. **Library** – Consider the use of grant funds for a photovoltaic system for the Library roof, and other buildings if practical. Select an Electric Generations Supplier (EGS) and consolidate or separate billing.

5. **Senior Citizens Center** – Consider replacing the boiler in the next five years. Estimated energy savings are \$3790 per year.

6. **Public Works Garage** – Perform basic weatherization and maintenance, as well as installing 7-day programmable thermostats to manage unoccupied temperatures for an estimated savings of \$2,000 per year.

7. **Plum Creek Wastewater Facility** – Over the next two years take a comprehensive look at the facility. The consultants estimate a potential savings of \$12,000/year in energy costs.

8. **Penn Hills Schools** – The Penn Hills School District recently engaged in a major new capital program to construct both a new high school and a new elementary center. As of this date Architectural Innovations, the consultants for the School District have assured the Planning



Commission and the Council that the District plans to utilize green technology and seek LEED certification for both new buildings. We commend this effort and encourage the School District to insist on this policy throughout the design and development of these two buildings.

Municipal-Owned Facilities

1. Conduct an energy audit of facilities owned and controlled by local government. Expand on the analysis prepared by Envinity. Look for the potential of employing new technology to reduce fossil fuel emissions or otherwise protect public resources.

2. Street Lights – Study the employment of new technology with our street lighting system. Look toward either increasing the efficiency of existing lighting, installing new lighting systems, or otherwise reducing energy demand while maintaining public safety. Join CONNECT and partner with neighboring communities and Duquesne Light Co. toward developing regional solutions.

3. Traffic Lights – Install new LED lighting on all Penn Hills traffic signals with the current grant proceeds. These new bulbs are evidently more cost effective and replacement now is a logical conclusion.

4. Reduce energy demand in Municipal Parks – study the current use of energy in our parks. Attempt to reduce energy demand for ball field lighting. Consider reducing the lawn and grass areas currently mowed. Analyze the use of water and look for possible reductions.



5. Municipal Fleets – Plan for reduced energy demand for all municipal fleets. Analyze the current energy use and make recommendations for reductions and cost savings. Consider the long range energy demand when purchasing new vehicles and incorporate green standards with purchasing specifications. Also, consider retrofitting existing vehicles with Blades and similar new technology designed to reduce emissions and/or generate fuel economy.

6. Wastewater Treatment – Analyze and consider new technology designed to minimize GHG emissions at the Plum Creek Treatment Plant.

7. Environmentally Preferable Purchasing – Consider the adoption of an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Policy. Reference this policy to employee training manuals and purchasing specifications.

8. **Municipal Resources** – Continue to explore the potential for gas well production, forestry, and other energy producing materials on municipal land. Consider the benefits to the community at large while maintaining Green standards.



9. **New Technology** – Be prepared to promote and utilize new technology such as rubber sidewalks, green roofs, and other interesting concepts that are being developed as we plan.

The Community

1. **Building Codes** – Consider the adoption of Green Building Code requirements. Create incentives for Green Building Design without enforcing regulations that generate excessive construction costs. Promote the use of geothermal systems and photovoltaic systems.



2. **Subdivision and Land Development** – Update the Penn Hills Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances to incorporate sustainable land use and land development policies and practices. Develop reasonable regulations for both commercial and residential windmills and similar land uses.

3. **Smart Transportation Initiatives** – The Municipality currently has an active application with Penn DOT for the development of two Park-and-Ride lots in Penn Hills. Continue to pursue funding through this program and otherwise support the development of facilities that lead to reduced transportation costs.

4. **Stormwater Management** – Continue to meet DEP stormwater management regulations while pursuing new methods to manage stormwater more effectively. Continue to look for more efficient ways to handle stormwater – develop swales, eliminate pipes when possible, and provide retention at the source when possible.

5. **Recycling** – The Municipality recently received a report and analysis of our current recycling programs. This report is identified in the Comprehensive Plan as Appendix ___ and includes a variety of recommendations that have yet to be officially adopted by Council. We expect to expand services in yard waste and we expect to continue our multiple materials curbside pick up program. This plan recommends that Council reconsider the recent decision not to switch to automated recycling this year.



6. **Greenhouse Gas Emissions** – The Municipality has also joined forces with its neighbors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Wilkins Township has received a grant from the PA Department of Environmental Protection to have a Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory completed and Penn Hills and Forest Hills are participating in the inventory study. The Duquesne University Center for Environmental Research and Education, (CERE) was hired to complete the Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory for the each of the three communities. Penn Hills, Wilkins and Forest Hills have also joined the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, (ICLEI). ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability is a membership association that will provide technical assistance and offer software to assist with the completion of the inventory. Municipal, commercial and residential greenhouse gas emissions will be evaluated. Upon completion of the GHG inventory a public meeting will be held and recommendations for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions will be made. CERE will work with Penn Hills and participating communities to pursue future grant opportunities that will fund renewable energy investment programs that promote energy efficiency.

7. **Green Gardens** – Consider the use of federal or state grant funds to develop community gardens and food production facilities for both private and non-profit use. Partner with Community Development Corporations. Promote the development of community gardens by non-profit and civic organizations. The municipality is currently providing land to the Penn Hills CDC for a community garden on Jefferson Road. Take steps necessary to provide for a partnership with the VFD's and the CDC for permanent garden space.



- 8. Maglev** – Perhaps no other facility would reduce fossil fuel emissions and reduce energy demands more than Maglev which is discussed in other sections of this Comprehensive Plan. It goes without saying that Maglev serving Penn Hills would represent more than all of the above in terms of modified life styles. It is noted, however, that the current federal commitment to funding high speed trains is limited. We can only look to lobby for and promote opportunities to bring Maglev to Penn Hills and be prepared to move on in the near future without Maglev.



- 9. Weatherization Programs** – The federal government is expected to develop various weatherization programs designed to help families improve the HVAC systems in their homes. We expect to monitor these programs and encourage qualifying Penn Hills families to take advantage of opportunities to improve their home and save energy while reducing emissions. We need to help those that have yet to replace old inefficient HVAC systems with modern energy efficient equipment.

Economic Development

Residents cry out for economic development. They want new businesses, new services, new jobs, and growth. They want to lower the tax burden on residential property owners and they want their Council members to deliver all of this in the short term. Everyone tries to help. The Chamber of Commerce and the Planning Department puff Penn Hills at every opportunity. We point out our best assets and hide the negatives when we talk to developers. And we want our newspaper reporters to print only the good news.

We want this growing economy in Penn Hills regardless of what takes place in the County, the State or even the nation. We get upset when we see vacancies in the shopping center and we wonder why the city planners haven't found new tenants. We complain that we lost Tivoli's and King's, and Morgan's and say we're tired of pizza. We look at situations like Vanity Fair closing and take it as a major problem for the local economy. These are all legitimate concerns.



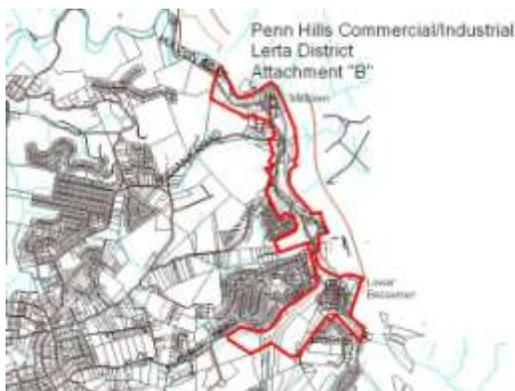
But this is the “let’s get real” comprehensive plan. We need to remind ourselves that we are losing population and that our average family income is decreasing. We may need to learn how to live with lower levels of activity. Do we have the population to support the same number of residents as we had in the 70’s and 80’s? Shouldn’t we expect fewer businesses to serve fewer residents? And how long will the current trends continue?

Some say the image of the Penn Hills School District is the number one economic issue in Penn Hills. We learn this from local realtors that say that the number one reason why people buy a home in any community is the quality of the local schools. We are in the midst of two major development projects with our new high school and new elementary center. Can we turn these new schools into a positive stimulus for new economic development?

All of the local officials are poised and ready to do their part to promote economic development. The Chamber of Commerce, the Planning Commission, and the Planning Department are ready to guide developers. The Council has expressed interest in tax incentives. Land owners are ready to make good deals and all those involved are working to create a developer friendly atmosphere. Let’s discuss some policies and objectives.

General Policies

1. **We Want New Businesses in Penn Hills** – The most attractive are professional and light industrial businesses that create living wage jobs. The best locations are infill sites adjacent to existing commercial and industrial development.
2. **Create a Developer Friendly Atmosphere** - The Municipality encourages both new development and redevelopment throughout the community. Try to pave the way for new economic development by processing applications in a timely manner. Connect landowners and developers whenever possible.
3. **Revise and Update Development Ordinances** - We need to improve development standards and foster attractive new development. We will continue to revise our development ordinances and adopt new techniques to minimize construction costs.
4. **Seek Out and Invite Businesses** – We want some of the higher quality chain businesses to come to Penn Hills (Olive Garden, Applebees, Starbucks, Old Navy, American Eagle, etc.). Seek them out, point out potential Penn Hills sites, and invite them to come.
5. **Promote the Creation of Community Development Corporations** – We are fortunate to have a new and developing Penn Hills Community Development Corporation in Penn Hills. Assist this CDC in its efforts and encourage the creation of additional CDC's in Penn Hills. Use CDBG funds to support their projects and join them as partners on various projects. If property becomes available that could be utilized by the CDC's consider contributing this property.
6. **Market Municipal Property** - Look to market municipal property for economic development purposes, particularly the Frankstown Old Garage site and the surplus land adjacent to the new municipal garage.
7. **Tax Incentive Programs** – The Municipality to this date has ruled out across the



board town wide tax abatement programs for either new homes or new commercial development. The Mayor and Council have, however, approved a Lerta program designed to promote commercial/industrial development in the Plum

Creek Corridor and new homes west of Verona Road to the City of Pittsburgh.

The Council also stands ready to consider tax incentives for any major new development that generates a significant number of new jobs or new tax revenue.

Economic Development Objectives

There are some properties and issues that demand our more detailed and specific attention in terms of stating comprehensive plan objectives. Some properties are of regional concern and could generate significant development. These are:

1. **The Thompson Run Corridor** - Along our eastern boundary adjacent to Monroeville and Plum Boro lay two large parcel of vacant industrial property. A two hundred (200) acre parcel immediately to the west of Thompson Run Road is commonly know as the Atlas Cement Plant site. This site is well known to long time Penn Hills residents who were here when the plant generated large amounts of Portland cement and fostered many jobs. Except for the silos it is essential abandoned vacant land.



Immediately to the east of Thompson Run lies the Gascola Slag Dump another large (300 acre) vacant industrial property.

The Thompson Run corridor has been the focus of potential large scale economic development for many years. More recently it came to the forefront again because of the proposed Mon-Fayette Expressway

and Maglev, so much so that the slag dump became the designated site for the Maglev Station (more detailed Thompson Run economic development studies are attached as an appendix to this plan). The high speed Maglev train is certainly a long shot but it would become an economic boom to the region if it were to materialize.



With this in mind we propose the following:

- Seek federal and state economic development funding for this corridor whenever possible.
- Promote mixed use development and consider any reasonable request for a zoning change
- Consider a sheriff sale as an incentive to bring about new development
- The Turtle Creek COG has recently received funding for brown field studies in the area. Seek a part of these funds for the Thompson Run Corridor.
- Continue to support the completion of the Mon-Fayette Expressway and the ramp connection of Thompson Run to the Parkway East.

2. **The Eastgate Commerce Center** – To the very west of Penn Hills adjacent to the City of Pittsburgh and Wilkinsburg sits a 44 acre tract of vacant land that previously held the East Hills Shopping Center. A recent plan to construct a Walmart and Lowes on this property has been put on the back shelf. We need to do what we can to bring this site back in the spotlight. The Planning Department recently applied for CITF funding to create an industrial park at this location and we will continue to submit these types of applications whenever opportunities exist.



- Work with Petra Ministries, the current land owner, to promote new development.
- Encourage the Allegheny County Economic Development Department to help market this site as a regional facility.
- Consider tax incentives as a method to lure developers to this site.

3. **The New Schools** – If the image of the Penn Hills School District is a major



economic development issue then let us promote economic development by focusing attention on

the new modern High School and Elementary Center. These buildings are under construction as we write this plan and will certainly be an asset to the community and its students. If we can feature the new construction to attract new families and new businesses to Penn Hills we can promote growth in the economy.

4. **Vocollect** – Now that the new traffic signal at Maple and Rodi has been installed the proposed development at the top of Maple Lane in back in the news. As of this writing the owner has requested a hearing on the proposed zoning change to provide for new development. We support the efforts of Vocollect and propose that we develop a plan that accommodates new construction while also protecting the value of adjacent single family homes to the east and northeast.

5. **The Rodi Road Corridor** –We all know that Rodi Road is the gateway to Penn Hills. We need to continue to promote quality economic development in this corridor both appropriate land uses and beautiful site planning. The Penn Hills CDC has adopted a Rodi Road Corridor Study as one of their projects and that plan is adopted to this Comprehensive Plan as



an appendix. The study focuses on the vacant Vanity Fair space in the shopping center and stormwater management in the corridor. It includes recommendations such as:

- Promote new construction on vacant lots and redevelopment in vacant buildings
- Undertake beautification projects. Encourage businesses to landscape and install improvements.
- Apply for stormwater management funds to undertake retention projects in both the shopping center and the corridor.
- Encourage the installation of rain barrels on residential properties throughout the watershed and undertake stormwater education programs.
- Improve culvert efficiency and stream capacity
- Promote improved property maintenance and code enforcement where necessary.

- Install sidewalks, particularly those missing links.

6. **Leechburg Road and the Plum Creek Corridor** - At the northeastern corner of our community Leechburg Road connects to Milltown Unity Road. The Union Railroad passed through this area back in the day and the yards and related activity were a significant part of our history. Today there remains a few opportunities for economic development worth discussing. First there is the vacant land adjacent to our relatively new Public Works Garage. The municipality bought a 27 acre parcel years ago to accommodate this new garage and we have some additional property that we could sell to promote private economic development. Most of this land is steeply sloped hillside but some has interesting development potential, particularly for anyone who would be interested in rail delivery. The Municipality should consider actively listing this property for sale.

To the north of this property Milltown Unity Road follows Plum Creek north to our boundary with Plum Boro. There are several properties along this corridor where the municipality could encourage light industrial development. To this end the Council has approved a commercial/light industrial Lerta Program to provide tax incentives based upon the value of new construction. We propose to continue to offer Lerta and similar tax incentive programs to encourage development in this corridor.

7. **Walmart at Saltsburg and Reiter** – As of this date a proposed Walmart development at Saltsburg and Reiter Roads is no longer a viable project. Needless to say a Walmart delivers a significant economic development impact on any community. In this case the selected site is a property Penn Hills had zoned for a shopping or retail center and a land development plan should be rather routinely approved. However, the developer had significant difficulty in obtaining an occupancy

permit from Penn Dot and has at least temporarily abandoned intentions to build.



The community now will look to support alternative development on the property consistent with the B2 zoning. This property continues to be identified as a significant opportunity for new commercial or mixed use development.

8.

8. **Vocollect at Maple and Rodi** –This project involves the construction of a new office/warehouse building on vacant land adjacent to their two existing buildings in Wilkins Township. The proposed new building would be on the Penn Hills side of the boundary and thus the tax revenue would go to Penn Hills. Now that a new traffic light has been installed at Maple and Rodi the application went back onto Council’s agenda and a curative amendment was approved. Ultimately the community hopes for a new office building and, more importantly, new living wage jobs in our community.

9. **The Verona Road Corridor** - The Verona Road corridor, for purposes of this plan, stretches from the Petra Ministries property at the south bordering Wilkinsburg to the intersection of Verona Road and Sandy Creek Road. It currently consists of a mixture of light industrial and commercial properties. Some are vacant buildings in need of significant repair and others are thriving businesses. The most significant parcel (Petra Ministries) has been mentioned above. Redevelopment of this parcel should be a priority. Businesses such as Molyneaux’s Carpet and Giant Eagle do well in the corridor while others such as Mr. Fireplace and Eastwood Inn have gone away. There remains, however, some good potential for redevelopment. We need to recognize that several properties in this corridor have significantly deteriorated and that code enforcement should come into play. The Giant Eagle is struggling to maintain a presence in the corridor and we need to offer support. Recommendations include:

- Identify deteriorated properties, inspect, and issue property maintenance notices
- Contact owners of marginal properties and identify those with redevelopment potential
- Encourage Penn Dot to make improvements to the state maintained road.
- Encourage Penn Dot to step up litter collection
- Take immediate code enforcement measures on properties in violation in the vicinity of Lime Hollow, Coal Hollow, and Verona.

Other code issues are spontaneous. When the Department receives a phone call that someone is dumping over a hill, or there's a bad storm and owners have a water problem that need immediate attention, normal schedules get adjusted and code enforcement officers go where they are needed. Perhaps the Manager promised someone that he would "get an inspector there right away". The priority list has to be flexible, and of course, public safety takes a first place. An unsafe structure will take precedence over high grass, and a sewer tap-in permit inspection will trump a junk car. The occasional public relations snag occurs when the inspector drops the ball, loses the list, and fails to get back to a resident with a legitimate complaint. The bottom line, these code enforcement officers, need our help and understanding.

With the prompting of Management the Code Enforcement Department has made a recent general decision to be more proactive and not necessarily wait until a complaint is received. We expect this to lead to a somewhat higher level of violation notices and citations. In line with these general principles a short list of priorities was developed by the Director of Code Enforcement in 2009. This list is a general reflection of common sense. It places a higher priority on safety and public health issues over aesthetics and minor complaints. This list is generally as acceptable today as it was five years ago. A vacant and open structure is still more important than high grass.



Code Enforcement Priorities

As per Code Enf. Director Feb 2009

1. Unsafe and vacant structures
2. Junk cars on private property (Police handle junk cars on the street)
3. Construction or building without a building permit
4. Failure to obtain an occupancy permit
5. Unfenced or unsafe swimming pools
6. Rubbish and debris, garbage, dumps, etc.
7. Hi grass (over 10")
8. Shrubbery, vegetation maintenance
9. Accessory structure maintenance
10. Missing address numbers
11. Shrubbery causing driveway traffic visibility issues
12. boats and commercial vehicles not properly parked

Citizen Participation

During public sessions on the comprehensive plan the citizens of Penn Hills continuously ranked Code Enforcement as one of the most important functions of the community. They want to protect the value of their own homes by protecting the value of every home in Penn Hills. They want to set a property maintenance standard that everyone must meet and they want the standard enforced. Demolition of unsafe structures ranked as the highest concern of responding residents.

Citizen based community organizations such as the Crescent Hills Civic Association have occasionally requested code enforcement contact information and monthly inspection reports for their neighborhood. Although their requests will not be specifically honored Council has already responded with general requests to Management for stepped up code enforcement throughout Penn Hills. They want Code Enforcement to be responsive to citizens and encourage community interest. They are considering a new Vacant Property Ordinance and other new tools for code enforcement, and they have worked with Administration in resolving the issue of junk car removals. The above mentioned Citizen Serve permit tracking system currently has a public access element which became available online in the spring of 2013. Citizen are encouraged to use this program for filing and tracking complaints. Council has heard the call for code enforcement loud and clear. They are sensitive to the need and are open to new tools and methods for improvement.

Building Inspection

The issuance of building permits and inspection of new construction is an important part of Code Enforcement that often receives little public attention. While a restaurant is under construction down the street residents are often more concerned with the junk car in their neighborhood. Code Enforcement must manage both.



Many local building code issues have been recently resolved with the adoption of the statewide Uniform Construction Code (UCC). Penn Hills adopted this code in 2004 and has been enforcing the UCC routinely ever since. The Penn Hills Department of Code Enforcement has committed to meeting training and education requirements for inspectors and we are proud to report that we have inspectors that have received various levels of experience. We have now developed “in-house” capabilities far beyond most Allegheny County municipalities. We have an inspector certified in both handicapped accessibility and commercial plan review and are capable of processing permit applications without outside help.

We have a Uniform Construction Code Board in place and ready to conduct hearings on appeals. The truth is that they have thus far held only one hearing on a permit matter. The matter of compliance with building codes has now become “routine” in a sense that contractors in Pennsylvania now have a uniform code, the code is reasonable, and the notion of meeting the code is expected by all parties. Public safety will not be compromised. The building permitting process and follow up inspections are handled well in Penn Hills and inspectors continue to receive appropriate training.



The Code Enforcement Plan

With the notion of improving and promoting quality code enforcement this Comprehensive Plan puts forth a series of position statements and objectives for Code Enforcement as follows:

Position Statements

1. We propose to operate on the basis that the Department of Code Enforcement will change little from a structural point of view over the next several years. The department will pretty much continue with the same staff and same duties. There may be enough interest to hire one additional inspector and there is room in the building to house an additional inspector but only future approved budgets will tell us for sure. The Comprehensive Plan will recommend that we hire this additional inspector and community support for the additional expense will be important.
2. The State of Pennsylvania will continue to set minimum training standards for inspectors and provide opportunities for this training. The Municipality will want its inspectors to meet the minimum standards. The Department Director will request money for this training with the annual budget request and it is expected to be approved.
3. Citizens will continue to demand more and better code enforcement. As our housing ages and maintenance problems become visible citizens will push for forced maintenance. The citizens will have online access to our tracking system and will also continue to direct their interests to local inspectors, the Manager, and to Council. Council will, in turn, direct the Manager, and apply pressure to intensify code enforcement activity. The work load in the Department of Code Enforcement will more than likely increase. We must discover ways to improve the working capabilities and efficiency of Code Enforcement.



Objectives:

1. **Increase the enforcement capacity for Code Enforcement.**
 - a. Eliminate or minimize non-code enforcement work such as the need to read water meters and prepare sewer bill statements. This will increase time for enforcement of property maintenance codes.
 - b. Increase the participation of others in code enforcement activity. Have the police officers and city planners take a more active role when possible. The Planning Director, as the Chief Zoning Officer, and other planners have related code enforcement duties and experience. Continue to use this resource, but additionally consider the systematic use of police officers for code enforcement activity. Eliminate the notion that code work is below the level of a police officer's normal duty.
 - c. Train all inspectors on the use of available technology such as the GIS system and RealStats. Purchase hand held equipment for use in the field and train inspectors to use this equipment. Use this technology to streamline administrative actions.
 - d. Code Enforcement has only very recently obtained ORI equipment. They now have similar capabilities as the police in obtaining information to track ownership of abandoned vehicles. We hope to see more effective removal of abandoned vehicles in the community and more prosecution capabilities.
 - e. Increase the number of citations for routine violations and attempt to minimize time for compliance – Learn and use Citizen Serve. Prepare and maintain computerized templates for code enforcement officers on standard violations such as junk cars, rubbish and debris, and high grass. Require that inspectors use these templates.
 - f. Continue to rely on the Planning Department staff for assistance with demolitions. The Planning Department currently utilizes community development for this purpose and provides major staff assistance to Code Enforcement in administering the community's demolition program.

2. **Proactive Enforcement** – Move away from the complaint basis for code enforcement. Train inspectors to take proactive code enforcement measures. Take action immediately upon a visual identification of a violation. Continue to take complaints and react accordingly, but establish code enforcement priorities on a basis of importance and scope. Require that inspectors initiate reports on code violations throughout the community. Follow up by assigning reported code violations on a systematic basis.
3. **Tracking Systems** – Develop and improve the new Citizen Serve program. Require inspectors to log all activity on Citizen Serve and equip inspectors with tools to communicate with other inspectors and coordinate investigations. Develop a program on tracking systems to trigger criminal and civil complaint filing.
4. **Abatement** – Minimize the amount of time from the discovery of a violation to abatement. Move toward minimal amounts of notice. Amend ordinances when required to minimize required notice. File complaints in a timely manner. Provide Code Enforcement with the money and tools to carry out forced improvements such as grass cutting, clean up, and boarding.
5. **Prosecution** – The Administration and the Dept of Code Enforcement need to meet formally with the District Magistrate with an effort to streamline procedures, increase revenue, and lower costs of prosecution. The citizens need to lobby appropriate agencies for improvements in the legal system that would benefit code enforcement and the administration needs to learn and utilize new tools such as the recent Act 135 and Act 90.
6. **Financing** – Provide a mechanism for code enforcement fines and the revenue from the collection of liens to return to the Code Enforcement budget. Although code enforcement should never be seen as a revenue source the return of revenue to the Code Enforcement operating budget can paint a clearer picture of the cost of Code Enforcement. Periodically examine ordinances to establish minimum fines for various offenses with the notion that minimum fines should cover administrative expenses. Encourage the Magistrate to impose fines when warranted to reimburse tax payers for the expense of prosecution.
7. **Ordinance Updates** – From time to time every development ordinance needs to be updated. This process has become somewhat automatic with the national models such as the International Uniform Construction Code and Penn Hills will participate in this process by taking whatever action is necessary to adopt the updates. Some of our other local ordinances such as the Existing Structures Code need closer attention. They need general updates but they also need to be constantly improved due to enforcement issues encountered by inspectors. One of the most recent examples is a case involving a broken window. This would seem to be a simple matter – the window is broken, fix it. The issue escalated, however, when a slum lord replaced window glass with particle board and defied the inspector.

In this case we had a landlord saying the repair was satisfactory, that the code was satisfied when



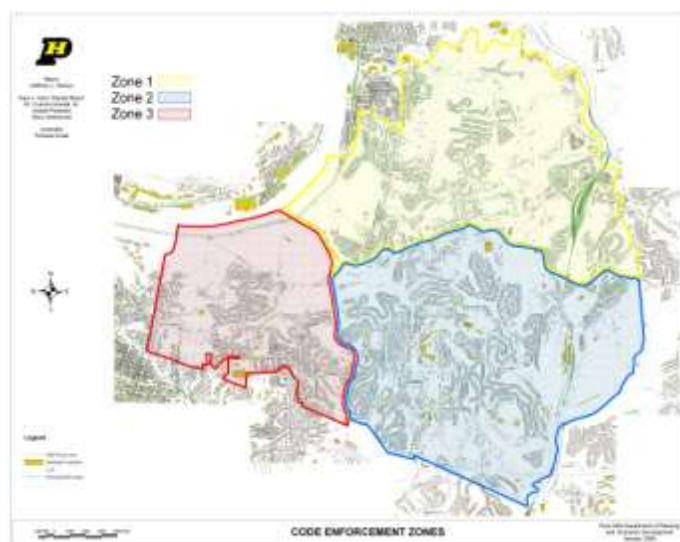
the broken glass was replaced with the particle board. We propose that this is a symbol of something that is not acceptable to our community and if our current codes permit this type of repair we will amend the code. Moreover, we want to respond as a community and say that we will not accept sub-par maintenance practices.

Some other areas where we are currently looking at code updates include:

- A. Authority – clarifying language under authority, allowing police officers, the Manager, and city planners to issue citations and assist Code Enforcement when appropriate.
- B. Grading – clarifying the circumstances that would trigger a need for a grading permit, and providing requirements for retaining walls, permits for retaining walls, and maintenances requirements for retaining walls.
- C. Temporary Structures – Definitions for utility trailers, temporary buildings and/or what constitutes a building. Providing provisions for not allowing inappropriate use of temporary storage trailers.
- D. Incorporating the storm water management ordinance into the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. Our current Stormwater Management Ordinance, Ordinance 2414, was developed independently from the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. These ordinances need to be reviewed for consistency.
- E. Adding development standards into the Existing Structures Code rather than using references. For example, Section 301.12 of the ES Code refers to the Performance Standards of the Zoning Ordinance. This is broad and unclear during enforcement hearings and needs to be spelled out.
- F. Update the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance – Grading requirements, street design standards, open space dedication requirements, recording clauses.



Code Enforcement Districts – The Department of Code Enforcement recently adopted a district map that divides Penn Hills into three code enforcement districts. A team of two inspectors is currently assigned to each district. It is the hope that this districting will help with communications and coordination. It will also be useful in tracking or knowing what inspector or inspectors are most likely to be assigned to various complaints. This new district map took affect in February of 2009,



We are currently considering the creation or designation of additional code enforcement districts. These districts would be small sections of the community where code enforcement is considered to be a pressing issue or item of particular concern. These areas need not necessarily be the “worst” areas of our community or the “oldest” neighborhoods. They can be designated to support other activity such as a redevelopment program, other community activity, or pending new development. They can be neighborhoods or districts where we think code enforcement can have a greater impact.

A possible code enforcement district program would be as follows:

- A. Define the boundaries
- B. Assign a team - a code enforcement officer, a city planner, a public works representative, and a police officer.

- C. Survey the district, consideration should be given to inspect 100% of the exterior of the structures and the property in the district.
- D. Hold district meetings with owners and interested residents.
- E. Develop enforcement priorities and goals.
- F. Develop a loan interest financing program or other mechanisms for helping property owners in distress.
- G. Systematically enforce maintenance code requirements, monitor progress, and report on accomplishments.

The theory is that with a concentrated effort code enforcement can have a tremendous visual affect on the community. Owners are brought into the process kicking and howling but the end result is dramatic. The success often depends upon how many other resources are combined with code enforcement – public works improvements, redevelopment loans, new development, etc. In previous years areas that have been considered for code enforcement include:

- A. The Hollows – The corridors extending from the intersection of Lime Hollow, Coal Hollow, Verona Road, and Sandy Creek Road. These areas have a significant number of problem properties, older commercial buildings, older homes, and blight. This area may be important in that it has a higher visual impact on the community as a whole since so many motorists travel these corridors on their way to other areas.



- B. Lincoln Park and Universal – The older neighborhoods in Penn Hills. They tend to have a greater number of older homes in various states of disrepair. They have a greater need for demolition funds, and tend to have a greater need for help with junk cars and litter control programs.



- C. Frankstown/Bon Aire/Laketon Heights – This area is sometimes thought of as an area in transition. Many homes are sold at very affordable rates and vacancy rates are not necessarily out of line, but property maintenance code issues are more prevalent. This could be a result of lower income families buying homes with limited capacity. A area such as this could benefit more from systematic code enforcement than more wealthy neighborhoods.

- D. Rodi Road or Verona Road – Some feel that we should concentrate on our commercial corridors, Rodi and Verona Roads, where the greatest number of motorists come and go. Rodi Road in particular is considered to be the “gateway” to Penn Hills. If we want to sweep our front door mat and welcome people to our home perhaps we should start with Rodi Road.



There are some downsides to code enforcement districts. First of all we have limited staff time and the Director argues that it can take time away from a more important case, or it could delay our time to react to other legitimate complaints. There is the backlash of property owners who protest to administrators and Council that they are victims of selective enforcement and subject to standards not imposed on other residents or businesses. And supporters of code enforcement are sometimes let down with the reality of the limitations of code enforcement. In any event, we expect that the concept of Code Enforcement Districts will not move forward without a demand from citizen and continuing support from citizens who want this activity. We suggest that code enforcement districts will not be designated and programs will not be implemented without the support of residents, citizen advocacy groups, and eventually the Council and the Manager. We suggest that the Director of Code Enforcement will not engage in this process without demonstrated support from both the community and the administration.

Summary – Code Enforcement

The bottom line for Code Enforcement is that people want more of it. They also want to see quicker results. This plan recommends a stepped up code enforcement program and hopefully more activity in response to this demand. The reality, however, is that there are limitations to what code enforcement can accomplish. Code Enforcement works best in conjunction with capital improvement programs and community development programs. Citizens must also be willing to pay the cost of code enforcement, the salaries of more inspectors, the funding of abatement programs, and the cost of litigation. Residents must

also be willing to step up and help their local government by talking to their neighbors directly, by showing a good example, and by helping when there is a genuine need.

