

Frankstown West Plan

June 2014 Draft

Introduction

While travelling west on Frankstown Road most long time residents of Penn Hills know Swanson's Pharmacy. This landmark tells many of us that if we continue to head west on Frankstown we will reach the Verona Road Frankstown Road intersection and will soon approach the City of Pittsburgh boundary line. Others know the Laketon Heights Methodist Church, the old Thad Stevens School, Mr. Fireplace, and, of course the East Hills Shopping Center property, now Petra Ministries. To distinguish this highway corridor and neighborhood from Laketon Heights or Bon Aire we, for purposes of this plan, will call the area Frankstown West. We draw the eastern boundary at Frankstown and McCutcheon and the Western boundary at the old Thad Stevens School. You can go either north or south from this corridor approximately one thousand feet and you have the borders of our study area – Frankstown West.



As a neighborhood base we have been invited to Frankstown West by Rev. Kincaid of the Laketon Heights Methodist Church and we thank him and his church members from the beginning for their hospitality, the use of their facilities, and for their participation in the plan.

2013 Sessions – Issues and Opportunities

In March and April of 2013 we had our first meetings at the church with representation from the neighborhood, the Penn Hills Community Development Corporation (CDC) and the Penn Hills Planning Department. We continued to meet throughout the year and developed the following thoughts:

1. **Neighborhood Plan Team** - It was established that the Penn Hills Planning Department was there to offer their staff and time in preparing a neighborhood plan. They also



come with some resources but certainly not enough to solve all matters. It was established that there was some money for sidewalks on some sections of Frankstown Road and that other funds were earmarked for Bon Aire Park.

In addition the Penn Hills Community Development Corporation has joined us in an effort to contribute to the community. They have a large number of volunteers with a variety of expertise. Members of the church and the residents in the room were also asked to help us spread the word and organize the neighborhood. With the involvement of the Penn Hills CDC, the Church, the Planning Department, and the local residents we feel we have the elements to carry out a good plan.

2. **Traffic Issues** – Cars tend to speed through this stretch of Frankstown Road. Between Verona and Laketon/Coal Hollow there are no stop signs or traffic lights so motorists tend to pick up the pace and endanger pedestrians. We need to consider traffic signs, monitoring cameras, lower speed limits or other measure to calm traffic.



With the above concerns in mind we invited our Police Department Chief to our meeting to discuss traffic issues and crime prevention in general. In preparation of his appearance Chief Burton and his department placed traffic monitoring equipment in Frankstown West and monitored the flow of traffic on this section of Frankstown Road.

The results of the study were that the speeding traffic appears to be more of a perception than actual fact. The number of vehicles exceeding the speed limit is no greater than any typical section of roadway in Penn Hills, and there appears to be no need for new traffic signals. Therefore this plan has no recommendations for new stop signs or traffic lights. It was concluded, however, that traffic calming features should be considered with the design of the new sidewalks. These traffic calming features were presented to the neighborhood residents by the Planning Director. They can include a combination of street landscaping and alternative surface materials as well as pavement markings.

3. **Sidewalks** – The Penn Hills Council has allocated funds for sidewalks along this section of Frankstown Road. We do not, however, currently have enough funding to construct sidewalks along the entire Frankstown Road frontage. The exact location and extent of phase one has yet to be determined. We have contracted with Gateway Engineers, the Penn Hills Municipal Engineer, to begin the design process. We are already experiencing some delays in this process due to Penn Dot requirements but we will continue to work

with both Gateway and Penn Dot engineers. We hope to tie together the sidewalk design with traffic calming efforts mentioned above. We also expect to have shade tree issues and retaining wall issues when we approach the planning team with more detailed design work. The current goal will be to begin phase I of the sidewalk in the fall of 2014.

4. **Bon Aire Park** – It was clearly stated that this plan needs to address Bon Aire Park. Recent storms have damaged the ground cover in the play equipment area and will continue to be an issue until the drainage pipes are replaced or removed. The overall use of the park needs to be analyzed. The park is severely limited in access and parking and becomes a problem for the very young and the elderly. There is strong sentiment that the park should be closed and funds allocated in the neighborhood for other worthwhile projects. Possible alternative uses of the property are – as a dog park, a community garden site, as open space, etc. with problems associated with each.



Water enters the park from the slopes on the south and west from many angles. The park is like a giant retention pond. A drainage ditch along the northern boundary protects the rear yards of the homes on Glendale. How to control this water is an essential item for any future park use.

The official recommendation of the Department of Public Works, the Police Department, and the Recreation Coordinator is to close the park, remove the equipment, and revert to open space. This recommendation will be formally discussed at the next neighborhood meeting and eventually placed on a Council agenda in a public session.

Bon Aire Park preliminary recommendations:

- a. Do not spend large sums of money replacing storm sewers. Instead open up these drainage ditches and allow the water to flow naturally.
- b. Remove the tot lot equipment and the basketball court and leave only the open field.
- c. Inspect and restore the drainage ditches along the northern boundary of the park property. Make sure that stormwater is flowing as it should.
- d. Conduct the necessary public hearings to close the park all together. Remove all play equipment and transfer all or some of the money to site improvements along the Frankstown Road corridor.

- e. Consider designating the site as a location for a future community garden should a future neighborhood based community organization step forward with a request.

5. **Demolitions** – A couple of structures on Frankstown Road appear to be candidates for demolition. The Municipality can focus code enforcement efforts on these problem properties and force demolition. Current candidates are 304



McCutcheon, and 10004 and 10008 Frankstown. The municipality has cited the owners for building code violations and has declared that the structures are beyond repair. A



building permit has been issued for 10008 Frankstown but there has been no activity and the permit is scheduled to be revoked. The Dept of Planning and Econ Development will work with the code officials and pursue demolition.

Title to the property will remain with the current owner and a lien will be placed on the property for the cost of demolition. Demolition is also required for 215 Howard Street.

5. **Neighborhood Economic Development** – The Solid Rock Foundation and adjacent



properties (Swanson’s Pharmacy) are the heart of local economic development activity in the Frankstown West neighborhood. We need to seek ways to help this organization improve and lease these properties as well as the nearby vacant Paul’s Café and Thad Stevens School. Other commercial properties are either in need of remodeling or other assistance. CDC volunteers can begin

by meeting with these property owners and discussing their needs. This could be followed by applications for funding assistance, financing, and business planning. We could begin by:

- a. Identifying vacant and available commercial space
- b. Reporting on the condition of this space. Its viability, status on the market, rehab costs, etc.
- c. Identifying proposed and desirable use for the commercial space.

- d. Identifying problems with existing commercial properties i.e. litter control, property maintenance, code violations, etc.



6. **Housing Rehabilitation** – We need to identify properties that are good candidates for housing remodelers or “flippers” who can be our friends and allies in neighborhood preservation. We need to provide owners with information on current available housing rehab loan programs and other resources. One particular prospect is 9930 Frankstown



Road, a five unit structure that has been vacant for some time. The CDC may be in a position to submit an application to HUD to acquire and rehab this structure. There are two others on Vantine Street. CDC volunteers can help by investigating ownership status, contacting these owners and gathering data for acquisition for rehab. The CDC is currently working with the Planning Department on various housing assistance programs to help owners maintain and improve their properties. We need to bring these programs to the attention of Frankstown West homeowners.

7.

Housing Opportunities/Issues:

- a. Frankstown 9930 – Five unit Apartment building, currently vacant, needs rehab.
- b. Vantine 9203 – recently purchased? To be rehabbed?
- c. Howard Street 132 – Vacant home with wheel chair lift, needs rehab
- d. Howard Street 183 – needs rehabbed, vegetation taking over
- e. Howard Street 211 – F file, vacant home, needs rehab, bad garage in back
- f. Vantine 9211 – needs a building permit, rehab taking place
- g. Vantine 9213 – F file, vacant home, needs rehab

- h. Conestoga 163 – Terrance has recently completed this project.
- i. Conestoga 156 – Home being rehabbed, junk car in driveway

- 8. Code Enforcement** – Frankstown West is no different than other Penn Hills neighborhoods in that code enforcement is needed to preserve the housing market and tax base. Most resident can and want to meet minimum property maintenance standards but some need to be forced. Typical code violations can range from minor litter and debris problems, junk cars, peeling paint, and broken windows to more major problems such as construction without a permit, transfer of ownership without an occupancy permit, and deteriorating conditions. We propose to identify code violations in the Frankstown West neighborhood and abate them. The housing rehabilitation loan programs, senior aide program, and other resources are available to those in need. The magistrate awaits those unwilling to cooperate.



Code Enforcement items to consider:

- a. Emerson/Tremont Intersection – excess litter
- b. Alley behind Laketon Methodist Church – Blue Chev junk truck
- c. Clinton 118 – low maintenance, leaves on roof, boarded up
- d. Conestoga 147 – commercial truck parked
- e. Conestoga 156 – junk truck? Permit issued but?
- f. Conestoga 200 – excessive trash (recycling operation?), citations issued?
- g. Frankstown 9500 – Sampson and Frankstown rear – debris
- h. Frankstown 9608 – do we have 2 op’s
- i. Frankstown 9929 – garbage on the side of the house
- j. Frankstown 10008 – most likely a demolition
- k. Frankstown 10004 - “ “ “
- l. Frankstown - Solid Rock Foundation – parking lot needs paved and/or sealed, remodeling project underway at the auto garage. Used car sales proposed.
- m. Frankstown and Lavern intersection – White van/zoning violation
- n. Howard Street 132 – High grass, property maintenance issues
- o. Howard Street 158 – junk blue car in driveway
- p. Howard St 183 – overgrown front yard, ivy taking over, F file candidate
- q. Howard Street 135 – property maintenance issues, vacant
- r. Howard and Frankstown – Bob’s Car Sales, remove temporary sign
- s. McCutcheon 218-220 – Overflowing dumpster

- t. McCutcheon/Frankstown - Don Malley's Auto Repair and Auto Repair opposite at 10024 Frankstown – both of these buildings and operations are in need of housekeeping and repairs. Also, outdoor repair of vehicles is prohibited and long term storage of unlicensed vehicles is prohibited.
- u. Sampson Street – pipes sticking out of ground? Demo site
- v. Tremont – at the bend, litter, hillside dumping
- w. Valley 9221 – hi grass but Ok, good flipping opportunity?
- x. Vantine 9211 – Building permit needed
- y. Vantine 9213 – house needs maintenance and or remodeled
- z. Vantine 9203 - “ “

- 9. Capital Improvements/Miscellaneous** – The Municipality of Penn Hills needs to increase street paving activity in the neighborhood. Howard, Swanson, and Evaline Streets need resurfacing. Clinton and others need seal coating or patching. The DPW is currently involved in a storm sewer project at the bottom of Howard but no other major public works projects are planned.

The church, the residents, and CDC volunteers will lobby the Mayor and Council to step up normal street paving activity in Frankstown West in an effort to support this plan and related matters. Any cursory inspection of these streets will demonstrate that they are worth of consideration under any normal maintenance program.

Additionally, the CDC currently has received some interest from a non-profit organization in planting shade trees and the CDC volunteers will pursue this possibility. The CDC will follow up on this and coordinate plantings in the neighborhood in accordance with neighborhood interests.

- 10. Neighborhood Initiatives** – We hope with this plan that residents of Frankstown West will come forward and take part in the process. It was mentioned that we should organize a neighborhood party, and the Solid Rock Foundation offered their parking lot for this type of event. This event could include a combination of food, entertainment, and networking. The CDC volunteers could help organize this type of event and focus on both expanding CDC membership and forming a Frankstown West Neighborhood Committee.



With this in mind the CDC has submitted a grant application to PPND for funding for this type of activity and hopefully a neighborhood civic association will materialize.

Intermediate Action – Citizen Involvement

After three sessions we have determined that we should continue with some of the following actions:

1. The Planning Department will seek to continuously involve the Police Department, The Department of Public Works, and the Recreation Coordinator.
2. CDC volunteers will canvas the neighborhood, talk to residents, and help distribute flyers advertising future meetings.
3. Neighborhood residents and CDC members will visit Bon Air Park and consider whether or not to endorse the recommendation of municipal officials to close the park..
4. The Planning Department and the CDC Economic Development Committee have obtained a proposal from The Pittsburgh Neighborhood Community Information System (PNCIS) to gather and analyze neighborhood data. Council has approved CDBG funding and we are set to go. PNCIS met with the CDC in January and will attend future neighborhood meetings.
5. The CDC Community Economic Development Committee will continue to have the Frankstown West project on its agenda and discuss further CDC volunteer involvement.
6. The Planning Department will prepare a list of properties that need to be investigated further, including either personal contact with the owners, Code Enforcement involvement, or re-inspections.

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Development Committee
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