

Highland Park Community Plan

Town Meeting Discussion Guide

June 20, 2003

Introduction

The community planning process is motivated by a number of concerns. Highland Park is diverse economically, ethnically, and racially. The community houses long-term residents and renters. Institutions, businesses, and recreational areas complement the housing mix. In addition, neighboring communities, such as East Liberty, are actively engaged in economic development activities that affect Highland Park. A community plan is an important step in both maintaining community strengths while providing a framework for inevitable development and other changes in and around the community.

The Highland Park community plan represents both a product and a process. It is a framework to guide development, fund-raising, programming, and other aspects of community planning. The community plan also represents a genuine effort to enfranchise the entire community in the planning process, in which community residents and stakeholders articulate their vision of a common future. A community plan is a working document that is molded and changed as the needs of the community change over time.

The plan should, and does, belong to the Highland Park Community. The process has been undertaken by the Highland Park Community Development Corporation, in conjunction with the Highland Park Community Club and the East End Neighborhood Forum.

In order to articulate community goals and identify appropriate strategies, the community plan focuses on key areas identified by the community, clustered into physical and human development sections. In particular, the following issue areas were identified by community members and will be discussed in detail at the Town Meeting:

- Housing;
- Education;
- Community Health and Safety;
- Arts, Recreation, and Youth Development; and
- Commercial development

Through surveys, interview, focus groups, and town meetings, members of the Highland Park community have said that they want a neighborhood where:

- Quality housing exists for all residents;
- Local schools have strong ties with the community;
- Residents feel safe on their streets and in their homes;
- The community's youth have a broad range of recreational activities and venues; and
- Businesses prosper.

Throughout the planning process, the planning team has heard a number of issues, some that are new and some that are not new to the community. The community plan is a process of taking these issues and turning them into doable strategies with real accountability. It is a framework for small, incremental changes that, over time, add up to real change.

Community Survey

The Highland Park Community Plan distributed and evaluated a survey of residents of Highland Park and portions of nearby neighborhoods in order to better understand the characteristics of those who might participate in community planning activities. A detailed description of methodology and analysis is available on the Highland Park Web Site, www.highlandparkpa.com, and will be available in printed form at the Town Meeting. This aspect of the project was led by Community Plan director Dr. Michael Johnson, with a team comprised of colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University and with support from Brean Associates.

Survey respondents generally like their community, especially the affordability of housing and the friendliness of the neighborhood. Interestingly, recent movers to Highland Park appear to be younger and more highly educated than respondents who have resided in and around Highland Park for seven or more years. Respondents profess strong ties with their neighbors, support political action, and appear tolerant of opposing political views. Survey responses do show, however, that ties between residents and local institutions could be strengthened. Overall, the responses point to the importance of focused efforts to enable residents to make direct, tangible investments in neighborhood institutions, and for community organizations to help residents feel at home and part of a meaningful community-building process.

Fundamental Themes

These themes represent basic and overarching community issues that weave through all issue areas:

- Building community within a neighborhood
 - Understanding the challenges of diversity
 - Communicating effectively
 - Enhancing existing delivery structures
 - Developing a volunteer core
- Effecting change at the local level
- Maximizing impact by combining initiatives
- Recognizing the interrelationships among issues

Community Planning Action Steps

How does all of the effort of the planning team and the community translate into action? Action requires a timetable, key responsibilities, and identification of resources. Action requires a strong volunteer core. And, finally, action requires a structure within which volunteers can feel and be productive. The community plan will outline these, following community consensus on goals, strategies, and priorities.

It is key to take steps that are doable and translate into tangible results. Tangible results are easier to accomplish in physical development, as bricks and mortar, but more of a challenge in the realm of human development. Here are some examples of specific actions that the community can take that are based on information we have received from community members during the planning process. We believe that these actions can result in tangible improvements to the quality of life in Highland Park.

One immediate step addresses the importance of *youth development* along with the issue of *strengthening residents' ties to the community*. Highland Park residents have known for a while, quantifiably and intuitively, that high school age students in the community are choosing Allderdice, Schenley, CAPA, and elsewhere over Peabody High School. The community plan team recently discovered, through our youth focus group, that, although the students are happy with their respective schools and friends, they would like to feel more tied to the community and to other Highland Park High School students. Four leaders of the focus group have identified 25 others to receive a letter to start the "Highland Park Youth Group."

Another immediate step, in the area of *community health and safety*, recognizes the importance of *combining strategies and actions for maximum impact*. The Community Development Corporation has identified a housing development strategy that targets problem blocks in the southwest quadrant of the neighborhood. The Corporation is at work on rehabbing buildings and generally upgrading the housing stock. Concurrent with these physical changes, members of a reinvigorated Public Safety Committee should launch an initiative, similar to the “U-CAN” effort undertaken on Bryant Street in the 1990’s, to make a visible community-supported statement for zero tolerance of illegal activity.

Finally, recognizing the link between *strength of local schools and vitality of the neighborhood*, immediate steps can be taken to shore up relationships between the Fulton School and Dilworth Academy. Principals and Parent Teacher Organizations have identified areas in which the schools can benefit from community involvement, including areas such as tutoring and mentoring programs, after-school activities, and grant writing.

Prioritizing goals


The third town meeting provides an opportunity to prioritize the goals and strategies developed and identify ways in which residents can actively participate. Given limits on volunteer time and resources, participants will be asked to identify the key goals and strategies within the greater list to be outlined in the plan. Goals and strategies to be reviewed are attached.

What’s Next?


We realize that this town meeting should not be the end of the discussion process. After the town meeting, there will be additional opportunities for members of the community to make their views heard. The Highland Park Community Plan website, www.highlandparkcommunity.com, has interactive discussion boards in which users can discuss topics such as public safety, housing, and arts. We will also have one or more meetings with representatives of local community organizations to discuss implementation strategies for the community plan’s recommendations. We may conduct additional meetings of the “focus groups” that generated the goals and strategies that are detailed in the remainder of this document. You can also contact community plan authors directly:

- Brean Associates: 412-244-3445; karen@breanassociates.com
- Highland Park Community Development Corporation: 412-665-3646;
hp_cdc@netzero.net


Housing

<p>Goal</p>	<p>Provide quality, mixed-income, rental and for-sale housing for all Highland Park residents</p>	
<p>Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of changing landscape of affordable housing • Residential quality • Enforcement • Special Populations’ needs: providing for diversity • Need for supportive services for struggling households • Marketing the neighborhood • Community Development Corporation role, vision, and activities • Need to coordinate with efforts of other, adjacent communities • Owner-occupancy as a key to neighborhood health 	
<p>Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a comprehensive housing strategy for Highland Park <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand Highland Park Community Development Corporation (HPCDC) three-year development plan • Focus efforts on improving housing of southwest quadrant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bring housing and community health and safety measures together for concerted effort; engage community volunteers • Address deteriorated properties being rented to problematic tenants. • Market the neighborhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand effort of Highland Park Community Club to centralize housing information; coordinate with HPCDC marketing program • Encourage home ownership to stabilize the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize existing programs for home ownership counseling - Support and expand home acquisition and maintenance programs • Encourage maintenance and beautification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinstate block clubs; broaden focus to include beautification as well as safety; institute a window box program - Utilize the community newsletter to identify “beautification of the month” - Provide volunteer assistance for seniors to address property care; coordinate with new-to-form Highland Park youth group - Develop and publicize toolbox to address nuisance properties 	


Education

<p>Goal</p>	<p>Improve the public schools serving Highland Park residents and residents' perceptions of those schools.</p>	
<p>Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood health and vitality are directly related to the quality of schools • Need to clear up misperceptions; need to know the realities • Want to leverage neighborhood energy and skills to collaborate with public schools • Magnets schools represent a double-edged sword • Priority must be placed on elementary schools of Fulton and Dilworth • Schools are only one part of the picture; need to examine arts, recreation, other opportunities • Need to work toward change within existing school structure 	
<p>Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create improved access to information about area schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide centralized information for current and prospective parents • Assess and address needs of schools that can be impacted by community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical needs - Extra-curricular programs • Forge partnerships with the Public School Administration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create mechanisms for communicating schools' needs to community • Capitalize on opportunities for community to influence change in schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop local leadership for education - Open up dialogue with Parent School Community Councils - Organize to testify at hearings of the School Board - Utilize bulletin boards and other mechanisms to educate and mobilize the community 	


Community Health and Safety

<p>Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe, drug-free community block by block • Develop a safe community image 	
<p>Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland Park perceived, in general, as a safe place to live • Public safety is one of the most important issues to address • Perception of safety as an issue in some areas where little actual crime is reported • Relationship between property dilapidation and illegal activity • Speed limit enforcement needed on major thoroughfares • Drug trade perceived as serious problem for Highland Park; greatest crime issue facing the neighborhood • Drug trade, noise problems, gunshots/violence and prostitution most prevalent and open in the southern portion of neighborhood • Some residents hesitant to report crime for fear of retribution • Good tenant behavior is critical to overall health of neighborhood • Homes along routes that kids take to the Park during summer are subject to casual, “situational” crime • Police generally very responsive when called, but seem unable to stop drug trade • Police organization in transition from Community Oriented Police to functional teams 	
<p>Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinvigorate Community Club Public Safety Committee into community-wide Committee • Develop network of active Block Watch groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address Block Watch burn-out - Connect Block Watches to neighborhood institutions - Utilize National Night Out for organizing Block Watches • Build awareness of the role of police through community/police partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage Block Watch members to enroll in Citizens Police Academy training - Develop institutional complaint process to allay fears of retribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize and distribute silent complaint forms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Department of Public Safety Silent Complaint Form ○ United Citizens Against Narcotics (U-CAN) Silent Complaint Form ○ Adopt-a-cop: Community appreciation event - Nominate problem blocks for Targeted Areas Program for problem blocks • Create an information-sharing network in Highland Park regarding crime and safety • Publicize the positive aspects of the community and progress made in public safety 	

Arts, Recreation and Youth Development

<p>Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and publicize all after-school and summer programs in the community • Provide a broader range and greater number of recreational activities and venues for Highland Park youth 	
<p>Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland Park is “spread out”: general need for communication among residents • Need to broaden use and knowledge of current resources • Want community center with indoor recreation: swimming, basketball, other activities • Need to think outside of buildings to include open space • Improve existing neighborhood resources • Need more intergenerational gathering places • Provide opportunities for older teenagers 	
<p>Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link activities and programs via “virtual community center” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration among all providers - Common marketing - Develop marker/identifying element • Organize and implement the year-round “Highland Park Youth Group” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify an adult volunteer advisor - Establish teen core - Identify volunteer or paid and recreational/arts activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior yard help project, vacant lot/community gardens maintenance • Utilize recreational/arts activities to connect Highland Park to adjacent communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support development of Union Project • Better utilize farmhouse for activities aimed at older youth • Take opportunities to bring together youth and adult activities • Develop additional recreational programs for school-age children • Create opportunities for young people and artists to create and showcase their art <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classes, galleries, performance space • Improve sports opportunities within the neighborhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indoor sports for wintertime - Better access to outdoor sporting facilities - Skate park • Improve dissemination of information about local and regional activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use town meetings as communication tools - Information kiosk 	

Commercial District

<p>Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create continuous, identifiable business district • Improve image of Bryant Street 	
<p>Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image of Bryant Street: need to upgrade and market area • Residents of Highland Park accustomed to shopping elsewhere for daily needs • Businesses do not feel “supported” by residents • Safety is greatly improved but good lighting is essential • Businesses and communities need better understanding of resources available for improving the district • District should build on mix of locally-oriented and “destination” businesses • District needs successful businesses • District should be marketed as an attractive alternative to higher rent districts in nearby neighborhoods, such as Walnut Street • Need current working knowledge of available space in the district • Highland Park residents respond and patronize quality businesses • Relationship between Bryant Street businesses and those elsewhere in neighborhood 	
<p>Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovate dilapidated buildings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus renovation efforts on center portion of business district - Assist with funding for façade renovation • Focus commercial development on Bryant Street Corridor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limit non-conforming uses - Reexamine zoning district boundaries in support of retained commercial district • Increase visibility of district <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop markers at entrance to street from Negley and Highland Avenues - Improve existing banners and lighting - Improve snow removal, trash removal and other maintenance issues • Facilitate creation of merchants’ association <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address issues such as night lighting, special hours, and joint events - Collaborate on marketing, safety issues, and fundraising • Recruit prosperous, appropriate businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and recruit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Stand-alone” businesses that would bring their own clientele ▪ Goods, services and professional offices missing from the community ▪ Businesses that could capitalize on what’s already prosperous there ▪ Businesses that could appeal to youth market ▪ Create/provide formalized information to interested businesses, including demographics, available properties, etc. 	