Homewood Cluster Planning: Cluster 6
# Table of Contents

Cluster Planning Overview

Cluster 6 Existing Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Conditions</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing Uses</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Ownership</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Vacancy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Zoning</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster 6 Meeting Summaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Development Principles</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster 6 Final Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consensus Vision Plan</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiative Plan</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phasing Recommendations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cluster Planning Overview

**Why Create Another Plan for Homewood?**

Change is coming to Homewood. The goal of Homewood Cluster Planning is to guide that change in the interest of Homewood's residents. The Cluster Planning process will create a detailed land use vision for Homewood's future based on the needs and desires of existing, present-day community stakeholders.

This process will consider both long- and short-term land use, working with residents in one part of the neighborhood at a time. Building on the neighborhood assets, the process will craft a vision for what should happen to vacant property; what types of development are right for different parts of Homewood; where houses should be renovated, mothballed or demolished and where new ones should be built; as well as where new businesses, industrial uses or parks should be located. After plans for all of the clusters have been developed, they will be brought together into a complete, community-driven plan for the entire Homewood neighborhood.

This process will not resolve all questions regarding how the vision will be implemented. However, it will set goals for ensuring that future development is equitable and addresses the needs of the existing community.

**The Cluster Planning Team**

Operation Better Block (OBB) was incorporated in 1971 and has worked for successful Neighborhood and Community Development over the last forty years, focusing on the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood. OBB’s mission is to strategize, organize and mobilize residents block-by-block to benefit the Homewood community. The Cluster Planning process is a natural extension of that mission.

Studio for Spatial Practice (SfSP) is an innovative, award-winning design firm with a multi-disciplinary approach to architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and art. SfSP specializes in public realm projects that engage clients and community members in creatively envisioning changes to their environment. SfSP brings experience and local insight to the Cluster Planning process, having recently completed the Bridging the Busway study.
Cluster Planning Overview

How the Homewood Cluster Planning Process Works

After an initial pilot study area was completed for residential blocks adjacent to Faison Elementary, the planning process began in earnest, in January of 2014, with an Introductory Meeting where an overview of the Homewood Cluster Planning process was presented.

As a first step in each cluster, OBB conducts field surveys to collect personal testimonies from residents and parcel-specific data within the target area. OBB shares their up-to-date information with the rest of the planning team and mails postcards summarizing basic statistics about the cluster to every resident. The postcards are a way to share the data that has been collected and encourage participation in upcoming planning meetings.

Three cluster-specific meetings follow, where findings are presented and residents’ input is solicited. OBB staff also go door to door between meetings, following up with residents to share draft planning materials and ask for feedback. Their comments are then incorporated into the planning work. At the third meeting, a Draft Consensus Plan is presented for review and comment.

The resulting Final Consensus Plan is included in a summary report and distributed to area residents. All completed Cluster Plans are eventually brought together into a neighborhood-wide Master Plan. The anticipated time line for completing planning for all cluster areas is the summer / fall of 2015.
Cluster 6 Existing Conditions

Assets & Challenges

Cluster 6 is bounded by Brushton Avenue to the east, Forest Way to the south, North Homewood Avenue to the west, and Stranahan Street to the north.

Portions of Cluster 6 are zoned Multi-Unit Residential, Two-Family Residential, and Local Neighborhood Commercial. A small area within the eastern edge is zoned for Residential Planned Unit Development, and part of North Homewood Avenue is zoned for Local Neighborhood Commercial use.

Cluster 6 is home to Baxter Parklet and the underutilized North Homewood Parklet. Parts of Cluster 6 have good quality housing stock, and the Homewood Avenue Business and Institutional Core is nearby.

Cluster 6 challenges include: working with a large number of vacant properties - particularly in the northern area on steeply sloped lots, delinquent landlords, and several deteriorating properties. Many vacant, dilapidated homes have been demolished in recent years, a practice that continues into the present day.

The following pages show existing Cluster 6 conditions relating to land and building uses, public ownership, occupied and vacant properties, and zoning. This key information was presented and made available at community meetings to help educate stakeholders about local conditions and inform discussions about land use planning.
Cluster 6 Existing Uses

OBB field-surveyed the Cluster 6 area to determine the existing uses of buildings and unbuilt land, which are reflected in this diagram. Understanding which lots are being used as sideyards, for parking or as community gardens, for example, helps to inform the planning process and action plan.

Existing Uses

- Residential
- Commercial
- Office
- Institutional
- Industrial
- Vacant Building
- Parking Lot
- Vacant Lot
- Sideyard
- Garden
- Park
- Woodland
Cluster 6 Public Ownership

Cluster 6 has many City of Pittsburgh- and URA-owned properties - mainly vacant land that could provide opportunities for developing new community-supported uses: housing, sideyards, open space, etc.
A significant number of Cluster 6 properties, buildings and land, are vacant. There are both challenges and opportunities associated with large-scale neighborhood vacancy.
Cluster 6 Existing Zoning

Cluster 6 is a mix of multi-family residential, two-unit residential low density, and local neighborhood commercial zoned land.

A collection of parcels located on Stranahan Street are officially zoned for a Park use. Neither Baxter Parklet nor Homewood North Playground are zoned as official Park land.
Community Development Principles

During the Cluster Planning Introductory Meeting, a set of resident-supported community development/planning priorities was drafted to guide the planning process.

The Principles, provided to the right, summarize the community’s expressed development priorities - at the time of this writing.

These Community Development Principles are a work in progress. As new priorities, policies, and practices are recommended during the Cluster Planning sessions, the Principles are modified to accommodate the most current and up-to-date community feedback.

Community Development Principles (June 2014)

COMMUNITY

- Collaboration is key: take into account existing community plans and other neighborhood organizations that are doing good work
- Create relationships and partnerships within the community of Homewood
- Use the process to educate people about what makes a successful neighborhood and community

HOUSING

- People who live in Homewood get to stay here
- If there is relocation, renovate or build new first, and keep people in their community or neighborhood
- Provide a diversity of housing types for families and individuals with different needs, lifestyles and income levels

ECONOMY

- Residents should benefit from jobs resulting from neighborhood revitalization: jobs that are created should be sustainable and not temporary
- Help local business owners sustain and expand their businesses
- Support neighborhood retail by buying local from community-run businesses
- Leverage Urban Industrial zoning areas to the community’s benefit
Potential Land Use Types

Illustrated examples of potential land use categories were presented to Meeting 1 participants. These precedent images were used by residents to help them identify appropriate future land uses throughout Cluster 6.
Cluster 6 Meeting 1

Date: March 18, 2015
Location: Homewood Senior Center
Attendees: 15

Goal
• Identify future land uses for Cluster 6 and consider ideas for the short-term use of vacant land (0-15 years)

Summary
• OBB introduced its staff members: each individual presented information about the program that they lead
• SfSP presented a summary of Existing Conditions and Land Use
• SfSP explained key factors that should be considered when making planning recommendations for Cluster 6:
  1) some blocks are over 50% vacant; and
  2) building new housing takes time and there is not enough demand to rebuild everything
• Attendees were divided into two groups to review and discuss proposed land use types
• Differing opinions were encouraged

Follow Up
• OBB knocked on approximately 462 residents’ doors after Meeting 1 to review what was discussed at the first meeting and to personally invite them to participate in the process

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and final report out by smaller groups. The following questions, summarized below, were asked after the presentation:

Q) Is it mandatory that every new window being put in a building (whether new construction or rehab) be double-paned?

A) Residential energy standards for new construction require energy-efficient windows to be used as part of an insulated exterior wall system. This can be accomplished with double-paned windows. Single-pane windows are no longer widely sold in our region, because of our extreme weather swings between winter and summer,
Cluster 6 Meeting 1

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

though they are still available. We are unsure about renovations, but energy-efficient windows are likely to be required if public money is used for a construction project.

Q) What is the City’s involvement in this planning process?
A) A steering committee consisting of Rep. Gainey, Councilman Burgess, the Mayor’s Office, City Planning, and the URA meets every 8-12 weeks. Participants are fully aware of and support the Cluster Planning process.

Q) Can a resident attend a steering committee meeting?
A) Yes!

Q) Why are we paying higher taxes than we should be?
A) Unfortunately, homes in the neighborhood have been assessed at a much higher rate than they are actually able to be sold for. Because of this, nearly all homeowners are paying higher taxes than is just. OBB, with the help of pro bono attorneys, took a case of about 12-15 residents to the Judge to appeal the assessments last year. Unfortunately, even though we had a solid example of recent home sales, property and neighborhood conditions, all appeals were rejected. If you are interested in working with us to go through the appeal process, we would be happy to help.

Q) Does zoning impact property values?
A) No, real estate comparables in the area are the primary determinants of the assessment value

Q) Has any development been done based on the Cluster Planning process? And has the City supported that?
A) Yes. The Cluster Association for areas 8 & 9 had the opportunity to sit down with a developer interested in building new residential units in that part of the neighborhood. They are still in discussion. Also, in Cluster 3, residents requested that new housing be built across the street from the new Animal Rescue League building. As a result, there will be 5-6 new “green residential” homes built with some financing and backing from the URA.

Break Out Activity Group 1:

HOUSING

- Renovate blocks with 1 or 2 vacant units to maintain/reinforce strong home ownership in the area. Blocks with many missing units may be candidates for demolition if larger development projects are needed.
- Build infill with senior housing on vacant lots closest to Frankstown and Homewood Avenues. Build veterans housing on Idlewild Street between Collier and Braddock.
- Build lower-density residential in the northern part of the cluster, where there is more vacancy. Group 1 did not locate an exact site.
Cluster 6 Meeting 1

OPEN SPACE
• Create ecological open space (wildflower meadow) along the edges of the Homewood North Parklet. Face units onto the parklet to help minimize crime.
• Create ecological open space on the slopes along Upland Street.
• Create a park at the corner of Sterrett and Kedron/Hermitage, and a vegetable garden or urban farm on vacant lots on Monticello Street between Braddock and Brushton.
• Ecological open space was suggested for the slopes along Upland Street.

DISCUSSION AND OTHER NOTES
• Bring a Community Oriented Police Station to the neighborhood even if it is not within Cluster 6.
• Include the installation of a discounted fence as part of purchasing options associated with the City’s Sideyard Program.
• Create a garden with a passage to the rear of the Frankstown Avenue Senior Center on the vacant lots behind the building along Race Street. Make the alley one-way to reduce speeds and help seniors cross to the center easily.

Break Out Activity Group 2:

HOUSING
• Renovate vacant units along Race Street.
• Build new housing at the existing density along Race, Hermitage, Monticello and Idlewild where homeownership is strong and blocks are mostly intact.
• Build low-density infill along Upland Street and at the corner of Sterrett and Kedron Streets.

MIXED USE
• Create neighborhood-serving retail or office uses at the corner of Race Street and Homewood Avenue.

OPEN SPACE
• Renovate Baxter Parklet and provide a baseball field somewhere in the cluster if space allows.
• Create open space at the corner of Homewood and Mt. Vernon and at the corner of Collier and Race Streets.
• Establish ecological open space, and clean up slopes, along Upland/Stranahan Streets.
• Consider short-term urban agriculture uses for vacant lots on Upland Street.

• Consider the future of the Homewood North Parklet as either urban agriculture/an ecological open space or containing active uses if enough flat space is available. Participants wondered if some of the parklet could become low-density infill in the future.

DISCUSSION AND OTHER NOTES
• Monitor the slopes along Upland and Stranahan Streets for illegal dumping.
• Consider a strategy to deal with the abundance of deer along the slopes at Upland and Stranahan and along Monticello Street at Braddock Ave.
• Consider how to keep large street trees from destroying sidewalks.
Cluster 6 Meeting 2

Date: April 8, 2015
Location: Homewood Senior Center
Attendees: 24

Goal
- Evaluate planning options so that a preferred, long-term vision for Cluster 6 can be created

Summary
- Ideas from Meeting 1 were combined to create land use options for the cluster
- Attendees were divided into groups in which two options for Cluster 6 were presented and discussed
- Residents identified aspects of the planning scenarios that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red dots
- Participants were encouraged to add notes and comments to elaborate on their preferences, or to suggest ideas that were not shown in the plan drawings

Follow Up
- OBB knocked on approximately 462 residents’ doors after Meeting 2 to review the latest draft planning materials

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and discussion of next steps for the Cluster.

Two distinct Cluster 6 scenarios were developed:
- Scenario 1- Convert the Homewood Parklet terrace into urban agriculture and allow woods along the slopes. Build infill housing at the existing density throughout the cluster. Create a park at the intersection of Sterrett and Kedron Streets. Reconfigure Braddock Avenue, at Baxter Parklet, to permit through traffic.
- Scenario 2- Convert the Homewood Parklet into wooded slopes. Build infill housing to match the existing density throughout the southern portion of the neighborhood, and build lower-density residential in northern areas. Create housing fronting a green at the intersection of Sterrett and Kedron Streets. Reconfigure Upland Street to be a continuous through street. Add housing facing onto the green space.

General Questions were addressed after the presentation:

Q: What does long term implementation look like?

A: The plan has to be completed in order to look for funding. The plan is a tool to guide anyone interested in building in Homewood, helping to ensure that future development projects will suit residents’ needs and desires.

Q: Is there collaboration between organizations in the neighborhood?

A: OBB is intentionally holding meetings at institutions that may not typically be included in such planning activities, such as churches. We are also reaching out to any stakeholders that live or own property within each cluster.
Cluster 6 Meeting 2

Q: Is there a possibility, with new home-building projects, that a deal could be worked out so that homeowners’ insurance is included?

A: This could be something that residents advocate for, along with OBB.

Q: What is the URA’s accountability?

A: The URA is a significant land owner in the neighborhood and frequently attends cluster planning meetings to hear firsthand what residents want and need. It is important for us to state a clear message, through the Cluster Plans, developing actionable items that the URA can work to accomplish with the aid, participation and guidance of community stakeholders.

Scenario 1 COMMENTS

- Strong support for community gardens in Idlewild Street.
- Support for renovating Baxter Parklet.
- No support for a new park on Sterrett or urban agriculture along Upland Street.

Scenario 2 COMMENTS

- General support for new infill housing and reforesting lots on Upland Street.
- Some support for reconfiguring Upland Street.
- Some support for converting all of the Homewood North Parklet into woods.
- Little support for housing fronting onto a green, proposed on Sterrett Street, or infill housing at the corner of Idlewild and Sterrett Streets.

Discussion & Other Notes

- Residents stated that Homewood lives matter. This process is not just about planning for vacant lots - it is about planning for the future of families living in the neighborhood.
- Community members want to check the ownership of the church on Race Street and the status of
Scenario 2 features the following interventions: convert the North Homewood Parklet into wooded slopes; build infill housing at the existing density throughout the southern part of the neighborhood and at a lower density in the northern portion; create housing that fronts onto a green at the intersection of Sterrett and Kedron Streets; and reconfigure Upland Street to continue through and add housing that fronts onto the green.

- Rebuild stairs connecting Upland Street to Mt. Vernon Street.
- The mixed-use property at 7203 Hermitage is being renovated into a commercial car detailing business.
- Homewood Ave. needs streetscape improvements including lighting (preferably historic), benches, etc.
- Call the area around the Coliseum “Car Barn Square” to reflect its history.
- Sloped lots need signage stating “No Dumping.”
- Require homeowners’ insurance for low-income housing properties.
- Bring an urgent care center to Homewood.
- Provide benches and bus shelters at bus stops throughout the neighborhood.
- Create a green gateway, open space, or garden at the corner of Idlewild and Sterrett, instead of building infill housing.
- Fix/ fill potholes along Monticello Street.
- General comment: Convert vacant land into urban agriculture that is tended to by a Homewood-based non-profit or for-profit entity.

Residents felt that a skate park, small theater, and other amenities are needed so that people don’t have to leave the neighborhood for play, recreation and entertainment. Residents also stated that all public spaces and parks should have lights to help minimize vandalism.

Participants suggested that the neighborhood-serving retail, proposed on Idlewild, should be a food store or community market.

Community members suggested that the Cluster Planning Association should create a list of available properties in Homewood that residents can purchase.

the abandoned basketball court on Hermitage Street.
Cluster 6 Meeting 3

Date: April 29, 2015
Location: Homewood Senior Center
Attendees: 14

Goal
• Evaluate the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 6, working towards a preferred long-term vision

Summary
• SfSP reviewed the content of Meetings 1 and 2 and presented a Draft Consensus Plan based on the scheme that had previously received the most support, while also revisiting the community’s interest in providing housing for a range of age groups and income levels.
• Residents identified aspects of the plan that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red dots
• Attendees added notes to indicate specific comments or ideas that were not already listed

Follow Up
• Scenarios were combined into a final vision to reflect resident input/feedback and this Cluster 6 report was distributed to all meeting attendees, residents and property owners

A presentation by OBB and SfSP was followed by a break out activity and discussion of next steps for the Cluster. A Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 6 was presented and featured:
• Renovate Baxter Parklet renovated and reconfigure Braddock Avenue to allow for through traffic.
• Convert vacant properties on steep slopes into ecological open spaces.
• Renovate vacant buildings where possible and build new infill housing to match the existing density throughout the cluster.
• Identify locations for community gardens and urban agriculture throughout the cluster.
• Develop cottage housing, for seniors, facing onto a shared green space.
• Reconfigure Upland Street with housing facing onto the existing green space.

Break Out Group 1
GREEN DOTS
• New housing fronting onto Sterrett Street, between Kedron and Hermitage Streets (1 dot).

RED DOTS
• Proposed reconfiguration of Braddock Avenue at Baxter Playground. Residents prefer the lack of a cut through (1 dot).

Break Out Group 2
GREEN DOTS
• No green dots, but residents approved of proposed interventions and expanded upon the ideas in handwritten notes on the drawing.
• Network of scattered parks (1 dot).

RED DOTS
• No red dots.

DISCUSSION, QUESTIONS AND OTHER NOTES:
• The church at the intersection of Sterrett and Race Street plans to expand their youth center: infill housing may not work as proposed.
• The mixed-use building at the intersection of Homewood Avenue and Hermitage would be acceptable if it contained a business other than a car shop.
Community members would like to see small businesses in old storefront buildings, such as at the corner of Sterrett and Monticello. Utilize storefront buildings and add small businesses throughout Cluster 6. (This may be a zoning change recommendation.)

Make Baxter Playground part of an expanded educational/ play hub. The school should acquire and incorporate vacant property into expanded playgrounds, courts, etc.

Provide basketball courts in or near Baxter Playground.

Keep houses affordable for existing community members to purchase.

Provide more life-supporting amenities in the area: a grocery store, pharmacy, gas station, drive-through food, a motel, etc.

Q: Who are the target buyers of the proposed housing?
A: New housing will not be limited to existing community members, but hopefully community members will be encouraged to purchase new housing.

Q: Who is part of the Cluster Association?
A: Residents, property owners, business owners, and institutions that live/ operate in the Cluster. OBB will help facilitate the association.

Q: How is the Cluster Association formed?
A: After the final meeting for each cluster, OBB visits door to door and later sends mailers about the Association, inviting members to join. A date and time is picked for the first organizational meeting.
Cluster 6 Consensus Vision Plan

Consensus Plan Key Components

1. Convert vacant land that is flood-prone or has steep wooded slopes into ecological open space for stormwater control and slope stabilization.

2. Build infill housing at the existing density on vacant lots and renovate existing vacant properties throughout the cluster. Assist homeowners interested in acquiring sideyard properties.

3. Build cottage housing, for seniors, facing onto a shared green on Idlewild Street.

4. Decommission Homewood Parklet and stabilize and reforest the slopes.

5. Extend Local Neighborhood Commercial along Homewood Avenue to allow vacant storefront buildings to be renovated into neighborhood-serving retail.

6. Enhance and expand Baxter Playground with updated play equipment, courts and fields. Reconfigure the street network around the park.
Cluster 6 Consensus Vision Plan

- **Homewood Clusters Planning | Cluster 6 Vision Plan**

**Key Points**:
- **Restore/ create woodlands at steeply-sloped lots**
- **New residential infill at the existing density**
- **Infill with small apartment building**
- **Renovate Baxter Parklet: new playground, play field, skate space and parking**
- **Reconfigure street for through traffic with new infill housing**
- **Renovate existing units where possible**
- **Upland St. reconfigured with new infill housing**
- **Focus new infill housing at an existing density in this area**
- **New infill housing facing gardens/open space**
- **New neighborhood-serving retail adjacent to business district**
- **Study viability of renovating fire-ravaged buildings**
- **Senior cottage housing facing open space**
- **Community gardens as per Race Street 20/20 Vision Plan**
- **Housing infill at existing density**
- **Renovate existing housing**
- **New green residential**
- **Trails / Open Space**
- **Ecological**
- **Small scale live-make**

**Additional Details**:
- Community gardens/ urban agriculture at locations to be determined in Cluster 6
- New infill housing facing gardens/open space
- Upland St. reconfigured with new infill housing
- New neighborhood-serving retail adjacent to business district
- Study viability of renovating fire-ravaged buildings
- Senior cottage housing facing open space
- Community gardens as per Race Street 20/20 Vision Plan

**Map Annotations**:
- **Restore/ create woodlands at steeply-sloped lots**
- **Focus new infill housing at an existing density in this area**
- **New residential infill at the existing density**
- **Infill with small apartment building**
- **Renovate Baxter Parklet: new playground, play field, skate space and parking**
- **Reconfigure street for through traffic with new infill housing**
- **Renovate existing units where possible**
- **Upland St. reconfigured with new infill housing**
- **New infill housing facing gardens/open space**
- **New neighborhood-serving retail adjacent to business district**
- **Study viability of renovating fire-ravaged buildings**
- **Senior cottage housing facing open space**
- **Community gardens as per Race Street 20/20 Vision Plan**
Cluster 6 Initiative Plan

Network of parks and ecological open space through the cluster

Infill housing at the existing density (+ some sideyards)

Renovations of existing structures where possible

Lower density or green residential

Local Neighborhood Commercial Zoning
Cluster 6 Phasing Recommendations

Short Term Initiatives

- Promote the City of Pittsburgh Sideyard Sale Program in which homeowners living next to vacant, City-owned land, who are up-to-date on their taxes, can purchase adjacent parcels for a low fee
- Create a Vacant Property Strategy detailing precisely which existing vacant buildings in the cluster area should be: a) renovated in the near future, b) mothballed and preserved as a future rehab project, or c) demolished

Longer Term Initiatives

- Update Baxter Park with amenities (play areas, active play space, courts, community gardens, etc) and an event space that will accommodate community performances
- Create a network of small parks on vacant land throughout the cluster with residential infill units fronting onto the open space
- Introduce ecological open spaces on vacant land that is steeply-sloped, wooded and/or flood-prone
Homewood Cluster Planning is a project of Operation Better Block, in collaboration with Studio for Spatial Practice.

For more information please contact at Operation Better Block  
801 Homewood Ave.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1444

412.731.1908 (ph)  
www.obbinc.org

Photos from the Cluster 6 Planning process