Homewood Cluster Planning: **Cluster 8**
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May 2014
Postcard sent by Operation Better Block to Cluster 8 residents after surveying the area. This postcard illustrates relevant statistics about Cluster 8 demographics that may inform planning discussions.
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 8 Existing Conditions

Assets & Challenges

Cluster 8 is bounded by North Braddock Avenue, Hamilton Avenue, the MLK Jr. East Busway and the alley behind Rosedale Street.

The MLK Jr. East Busway Wilkinsburg Station is an important asset in Cluster 8. The Rosedale Block Cluster has a strong presence in the local community, with its urban farm on Tioga Street. 7800 Susquehanna is also emerging as a positive presence and potential job generator.

Cluster 8 challenges include working with a large number of vacant properties, incompatible land uses, zoning that doesn’t match existing building types and/or uses, delinquent landlords, crime and deteriorating properties.

Cluster 8 is partially zoned Urban Industrial and there are still some light industrial uses on the Homewood side of the Busway. Additionally, Cluster 8 has a Local Neighborhood Commercial Zone at the intersection of Brushton and Hamilton, with the remainder of the Cluster zoned for high-density single-family and multi-family residential.

The following pages show existing Cluster 8 conditions relating to land and building uses, occupied and vacant properties, homeowners and renters, and zoning. This key information was presented and made available at community meetings to help educate stakeholders about local conditions and to inform discussions about land use planning.
Cluster 8 Existing Uses

OBB field surveyed the Cluster 8 area to determine the existing uses of buildings and land, which are reflected in this diagram. Understanding which unbuilt lots are being used as sideyards, for parking or as community gardens, for example, will help inform the planning process and action plan.
Cluster 8 Existing Homeowners and Renters

OBB talked with residents in this area and was able to identify where homeowners and renters live. GIS analysis was used to identify other likely homeowners receiving the Homestead exemption. As a priority, Homewood Cluster Planning will support the needs and interests of existing residents.
Cluster 8 Existing Vacancy

Occupied and Vacant

A significant number of Cluster 8 properties, buildings and land, are vacant. There are both challenges and opportunities associated with large-scale neighborhood vacancy.
Cluster 8 Existing Zoning

Existing Zoning

Cluster 8 is an uncommon mix of residential, commercial and industrially-zoned land. Historically, this has led to some conflicts between uses. Additionally, a large number of non-conforming buildings and uses do not match the current Zoning designation of the land upon which they sit.
Community Priorities

- People who live in Homewood should get to stay here
- Residents should benefit from jobs resulting from neighborhood; jobs that are created should be sustainable and not temporary
- Create relationships and partnerships
- Consider a commercial district and what it takes to sustain it
- Leverage the Urban Industrial Zoning to the community’s benefit
- Need to recondition people/residents to shop locally: support neighborhood retail
- Help local business owners build up their businesses
- Educate people about what makes a successful neighborhood and community
- Collaboration is key: take into account existing community plans and other neighborhood organizations that are doing good work

Parking Lot

- What is landbanking?
- What other planning processes or development efforts are currently going on in the area?
- Explore ridership at the Wilkinsburg versus the Homewood station. Is one used more than the other? Is there a way to more evenly distribute the through-traffic load and to reduce perceived safety threats surrounding Homewood Station?
- Homewood doesn’t feel like a cohesive neighborhood. Can OBB educate Homewood about healthy community practices?
- Tenants/renters didn’t receive meeting notices: OBB should make sure that notices are received and all renters are contacted
- Safety threat to hold meetings late: OBB will provide rides to and from meetings if residents call ahead of time
- A process similar to the Cluster Planning Model has been used elsewhere - the Planning Team should research/learn about other similar processes to find out what worked and didn’t work, and also provide Homewood residents with more information about the Cluster Planning process
Cluster 8 Meeting 1

Cluster 8 Potential Land Use Types
Illustrated examples of the potential land use categories were presented to Meeting 1 participants. These annotated precedent images were used by residents to help them identify appropriate future land uses throughout Cluster 8.
Cluster 8 Meeting 1

Date: Feb. 19, 2014
Location: Bethany Baptist Church
Attendees: 21

Goal
• Identify future land uses for Cluster 8 and consider ideas for the short-term use of vacant land (0-15 years)

Summary
• SfSP presented a summary of Existing Conditions
• SfSP explained that three key factors should be considered when making planning recommendations for Cluster 8: 1) the Zoning does not match the actual land uses, 2) some blocks are over 30% vacant, and 3) building new housing takes time and there is not enough demand to rebuild everything.
• Attendees were divided into four groups to review and discuss proposed land use types. Pre-cut pieces of colored foam were used to indicate which uses belong in different parts of the cluster, and more-detailed notes were added to provide commentary or suggest an idea or use that was not listed.
• Differing opinions were encouraged.

Follow Up
• OBB knocked on approximately 135 residents’ doors after Meeting 1 to review draft planning materials
Cluster 8 Meeting 1

Break Out Group 1

HOUSING
• Provide new affordable housing on Tioga Street beginning at Braddock Avenue
• Preference for the existing traditional housing pattern: concern that lower density housing provides places for criminals to hide between units
• Fill in gaps along Hale Street to tighten up the block
• Renovate dilapidated rowhouse units on Brushton Avenue
• Rehab units on Susquehanna and Braddock Avenue that need “tender love”

OPEN SPACE
• Create quality open space behind Homewood Church of Christ at Brushton and Hamilton
• Provide Ecological or Passive recreation space at the corner of Cora and Mulford Streets
• Maintain space behind the Busway for recreation fields
• Capture stormwater runoff along the northern edge of the Busway

MIXED USE
• Desire for small-scale commercial at the intersection of Brushton/Mulford
• The Bethany Baptist Church sanctuary will be built on its existing parking lot, moving church parking across Tioga street; the existing building will serve as a community/athletic center
• A small-scale commercial venture is desirable at the corner of Tioga and Rosedale Streets (though it is outside of Cluster 8)

Break Out Group 2

HOUSING
• Provide housing on Susquehanna just in from corner of Brushton Ave
• Provide lower density Green Residential housing on vacant portions of Hale and Fram Streets
• Demolish or rehabilitate building at the corner of Brushton and Susquehanna
• Demolish buildings at Braddock Ave, Mulford and Hale, and Mulford and Cora

OPEN SPACE
• Urban Farm proposed at Susquehanna, Mulford and Cora between Brushton and Braddock Avenues

Examples of single-family and multi-unit housing, along with mixed-use and Live/Make buildings.
Cluster 8 Meeting 1

Break Out Group 3

HOUSING
• Provide housing along Rosedale Avenue, even though it is outside of the cluster
• Provide townhouses along Hamilton Avenue
• Renovate housing across from the current Bethany Baptist Church
• Provide new, lower-density, green residential development along Susquehanna Street and Brushton Avenue

OPEN SPACE
• Provide Urban Farm on vacant lots along Hale Street
• Create Ecological open space at vacant property on Fram Street, surrounded by new housing
• Provide space for a sod farm on Tioga Street adjacent to Braddock Avenue
• Create Ecological open space along the dump sites at Finance Street and behind the housing on Susquehanna adjacent to 7800 Susquehanna
• Create open space next to the proposed Bethany Baptist Church parking lot

MIXED USE
• Maintain and rehabilitate the existing shopping center at the intersection of Brushton Avenue and Mulford Street
• Provide large-scale employment along Susquehanna Street, flanking the existing housing
• Use 7800 Susquehanna as an employment center
• A “Town Square” is recommended at the corner of Hale and Mulford Streets

Break Out Group 4

HOUSING
• Provide apartments along Brushton Avenue as apartments
• Provide new townhouses along Tioga Street
• Renovate the apartment building on Tioga Street and add another large apartment building adjacent to it
• Renovate units at the intersection of Mulford Street and Brushton Avenue
• Provide new, lower density, affordable, green residential housing along Hale and Fram Streets

MIXED USE
• Add small-scale commercial/retail at the old gas station site along Rosedale Avenue
• Create a coffee shop next to the Busway entrance
• Park buses on vacant land along Tioga Street
• Provide large-scale employment along Susquehanna Street alongside the existing housing
• Use 7800 Susquehanna as an employment center
• Provide a job-producing employment location at Tioga Street on vacant land
• Owners on Cora Street want to purchase vacant sideyards
Cluster 8 Meeting 2

Date: March 12, 2014
Location: Bethany Baptist Church
Attendees: 12

Goal
• Evaluate planning options for each sub-area so that a preferred, long-term vision for cluster 8 can be created

Summary
• An overview of the 7800 Susquehanna development project was presented: see page 16 for a summary of key points
• Ideas from Meeting 1 were combined to create land use options for the cluster
• Attendees were divided into three groups: options for three Cluster 8 sub-areas were presented and discussed
• Residents identified aspects of the planning scenarios that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red dots
• Using a blue dot, residents voted for the option in each sub-area that they liked best
• Participants were encouraged to add notes/comments to elaborate on their preferences or to suggest ideas that were not shown in the plan drawings

Follow Up
• OBB knocked on approximately 135 residents’ doors after Meeting 2 to review the latest draft planning materials

Cluster 8 was divided into 3 sub-areas for deeper study: the Area of Consensus along Hamilton Avenue, the Urban Industrial Zone and the Residential Zone south of Mulford Street.
Cluster 8 Meeting 2

The 7800 Susquehanna Street Project

Bill Krahe and Dwayne Rankin, of Bridgeway Capital, presented an overview of the 7800 Susquehanna development project. Bridgeway Capital, a nonprofit small business leader, is investing in the project. Its mission is making Western PA a thriving region by giving loans to bring businesses to low-income and minority communities, connecting the community with its businesses, and working to eliminate financial barriers to starting businesses.

**7800 Susquehanna Highlights:**

- Potential clients include cabinet and furniture makers, sculptors and movie set production companies
- Trade schools are interested in renting space for hands-on instruction in the fields of masonry, welding and roof construction
- Renovations will update the building exterior and interior, make the building more accessible and improve the parking lot and surrounding acreage
- Additional blighted properties in the neighborhood may be acquired
- A general community meeting was held on March 27th to discuss plans and a building tour was held in April
- A website is being created for soliciting ideas about building improvements, naming opportunities, etc.

Urban Industrial Zone Comments

- Keep the industrial zoning and encourage a mix of new and existing neighborhood-based businesses. Bridgeway Capital, associated with the 7800 Susquehanna project, expressed a desire to invest in businesses and land development in this area (see box at left)
- While there was still a desire to see new housing in close proximity to existing and future jobs, the idea of entirely shifting the area to a residential use was no longer viewed as being the best long-term use
- Everyone supported the idea of evolving the Rosedale Block Cluster’s building and garden plots into a larger working urban farm
Cluster 8 Meeting 2

Residential Zone Comments
- General support for introducing a new street connection through Tioga Street, from Mulford to Susquehanna
- Residents want the one-way street patterns to be rethought
- There was equal support for low- and medium-density plans
- Parks should be sized and provided with amenities to attract all community members so that people can get to know each other
- Parks for children are badly needed
- Parks may be a detractor and lead to unwanted behavior
- Should apartment buildings be considered? In the past, they haven’t been well-maintained, so there is a general preference for single-family houses
- Create community gardens in vacant lots: larger lots and more sideyards are preferred over higher-density houses
- We need a post office back in Homewood: renovate/rehab the former post office building

Area of Consensus Comments
- Recognize Teeny Harris’ house as a landmark (7608 Mulford Street)
- Keep Brushton zoned as commercial because it leads to the Park and Ride lot
- Very good bus service in this area, both local service and express at the Busway
- Renovate and encourage new businesses in non-residential buildings on Hamilton Avenue at Mulford Street
Cluster 8 Meeting 3

Date: April 9, 2014
Location: 7800 Susquehanna St.
Attendees: 16

Goal
• Provide a tour of 7800 Susquehanna
• Evaluate the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 8 plan, working towards a preferred long-term vision

Summary
• SfSP explained the updated Cluster Area Map boundaries (see page 4). Some clusters were combined to advance the overall project schedule. A cluster containing the Homewood Avenue business district and adjacent cultural district was created, in part, to support the upcoming Transit Redevelopment Investment District (TRID) study. All Homewood residents and stakeholders will be invited to help create a plan for the business district that will guide and inform the TRID study.
• SfSP reviewed the content of Meetings 1 and 2 and presented a Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 8 based on the scheme with the most community support and including elements of other schemes that had received positive feedback
• Residents identified aspects of the plan that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red sticker dots
• Attendees added notes to indicate specific comments or ideas that were not listed

Follow Up
• This Cluster 8 report was distributed to residents

Above: Draft Cluster 8 Plan illustrations, based on resident preferences
Cluster 8 Meeting 3

Break Out Group 1

- 2 green dots on the proposed park
- 1 green dot on green residential housing: the scale of infill looked appropriate for the cluster
- 1 green dot for the expanded urban industrial area shown along Susquehanna Street and the ecological green space behind it
- No red dots

General Comments

- Residents liked the plan overall and thought that it presented good solutions for Cluster 8

Break Out Group 2

- 2 green dots on the proposed park
- 2 red dots next to 7800 Susquehanna where a new building and stormwater management were shown: the developers will probably need all of that area for surface parking
- 1/2 red dot near park and housing: to prevent unwanted activity in the park without any supervision, the park should not be built before the housing

General Comments

- Fram Street extension could end at a new Busway connection to promote connectivity from the Busway into the neighborhood
- Maximize commercial uses in 7800 Susquehanna and surrounding parcels

Top: Attendees identified aspects of the Draft Consensus Plan for Cluster 8 that they liked and didn’t like, using green and red sticker dots
Below: Photographs from the interactive break-out session
Cluster 8 Consensus Vision Plan

Consensus Plan Key Components

1. New Live/Make and Urban Industrial parcels introduced between Brushton and Braddock

2. Rosedale Urban Farm expanded

3. Finance Street replaced with ecological green between Brushton and Braddock

4. New urban industrial parcels along Susquehanna Street with ecological green at the East Busway edge

5. New park with surrounding low density infill housing between Fram and Hale

6. Fram Street extended from proposed park to Susquehanna Street with infill housing

7. New infill housing and renovated units along Hamilton and Mulford. Sideyard acquisition encouraged for existing homeowners
Cluster 8 Consensus Vision Plan

- New infill housing
- Expanded Industrial Uses
- Low density infill housing surrounds new park
- Rosedale playground
- Ecological open space at Busway edge helps control stormwater runoff and provides amenity
- Rosedale Urban Farm expanded and small-scale Live/Make parcels at farm edge
- Fram Street extended
- Renovated housing

Legend:
- Housing Infill
- Renovate Existing Housing
- New Green Residential
- Urban Agriculture
- Recreation
- Ecological

- Small-Scale Live/Make
- Large-Scale Employment
- Institutional Expansion

Housing Infill
Renovate
Existing Housing
New Green
Residential
Urban
Agriculture
Recreation
Ecological

Small-Scale
Live/Make
Large-Scale
Employment
Institutional
Expansion
Cluster 8 Initiative Plan

- **Sideyards, demolitions, renovations and infill housing**
- **Introduce Live/Make parcels**
- **Urban Farm expansion**
- **Decommission Finance St. and relocate businesses. Green the Busway edge.**

Encourage industrial uses and infill along Susquehanna St. Rezone where necessary. Low density housing around new park. Extend Fram and create a new street from Cora to Hale.

Encourage industrial uses and infill along Susquehanna St. Rezone where necessary.
Cluster 8 Phasing Recommendations

Current Initiatives
• 7800 Susquehanna Street development
• Rosedale Block Cluster activities and Urban Farm on Tioga Street
• Bethany Baptist Church expansion and parking lot development

Short Term Initiatives
• Promote the City of Pittsburgh Sideyard Program. 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.
• Identify priority infill housing sites and work with a developer or developers to build new homes.
• Work to decommission Finance Street, between Braddock and Brushton Avenues, and relocate businesses to more accommodating sites. This will start to green the Busway edge allowing for stormwater management, a pedestrian trail and a new neighborhood gateway.

Longer Term Initiatives
• Rezone the 7700 block of Susquehanna Street from residential to Urban Industrial.
• Encourage new Live/Make uses in the area between Braddock and Brushton Avenues, along Tioga and Susquehanna Streets.
• Create new, lower-density residential development south of Mulford Street. This project includes extending Fram Street to Susquehanna, making a new street connection from Fram to Cora Street, and creating a new park with a play area and stormwater management.
• Study opportunities for revising the current one-way traffic patterning in Cluster 8 to support the new Live/Make district, accommodate new street connections and account for the removal of part of Finance Street.
Photos from the Cluster 8 Planning process
Homewood Cluster Planning is a project of Operation Better Block, in collaboration with Studio for Spatial Practice.

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