

“SOLID AND SALVABLE:” ACTION-HOUSING, INC. AND URBAN RENEWAL  
IN PITTSBURGH, PA

A Thesis

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by

Maya Catherine Haptas

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis traces ACTION-Housing, Inc.'s responses to urban renewal in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The non-profit organization instituted a participatory planning process called Neighborhood Urban Extension that began in the neighborhood of Homewood-Brushton in 1960. Massive urban renewal projects in the late 1950's redeveloped downtown Pittsburgh resulting in the displacement of the city's African-American residents in the Lower Hill. ACTION-Housing's leaders felt that the rehabilitation of existing buildings would generate much needed low-to-moderate income housing in the city.

The organization's relationship with the primarily African-American neighborhood of Homewood-Brushton led it to develop twenty-two units of rehabilitated housing on Cora Street. This pilot project utilized federal subsidies that were necessary to finance the project and keep the units affordable. Based on the success of Cora Street, ACTION-Housing developed the Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation to implement this kind of residential rehabilitation on a massive scale. The corporation utilized a revolving loan fund built from private investment for the initial capital and again relied on federal subsidies to keep projects affordable. Although the corporation faltered, it provides an important example of Pittsburgh's transition from the destructive planning practice of urban renewal to regeneration through preservation and community development.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maya Haptas was born in Berkeley, California on October 9, 1978 and grew up in Palo Alto before moving to New York to attend Bard College in 1996. Maya graduated from Bard in 2000 with a B.A. in American Studies. In the summer of 1999 she worked in Boston on the PBS series “This Far by Faith,” which shaped her undergraduate thesis: “So Tall Within: Sojourner Truth Through the Currents of American History.” After graduation, Maya moved to Pittsburgh, PA where she worked as associate director Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for five years before entering Cornell’s Historic Preservation Planning Program in 2006.

Maya worked for the San Francisco City Planning Department in the summer of 2007 as an intern for the Historic Resources Survey Team. While at Cornell Maya served as president of the Preservation Studies Student Organization, received a Founders’ scholarship from the National Society of the Women Descendants of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company and was selected as the 2008 American Planning Association Urban Design & Preservation Division Fellow. Maya is a member of the Association for Preservation Technology and the American Planning Association. She currently lives in Pittsburgh, PA.



For my parents

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTION	American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods
ACTION-Housing	ACTION-Housing, Inc. (Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods – Housing, Incorporated)
ACCD	Allegheny Conference on Community Development
AHRCO	Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation
CCCP	Citizen Committee on the City Plan
CPC	City Planning Commission
CRP	Community Renewal Program
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
FHHFA	Federal Housing and Home Finance Administration
HBCRC	Homewood-Brushton Citizens Renewal Council
HCIA	Homewood Community Improvement Association
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
NUE	Neighborhood Urban Extension
PCC	Pittsburgh Civic Commission
PHA	Pittsburgh Housing Authority
PRPA	Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association
RPAA	Regional Planning Association of America
URA	Urban Redevelopment Authority



## INTRODUCTION

How do we encourage a truly cooperative effort on the part of citizens for development of real power for proper regeneration of urban areas?

-Jane Jacobs, February 22, 1962 Lecture in Pittsburgh, PA entitled "The Citizen and Urban Renewal – Participation or Manipulation?"<sup>1</sup>

In 1960, Pittsburgh's urban renewal program was at a crossroads. Local government still supported widespread urban renewal with the belief that large-scale demolition projects would wipe out blight and create better living environments for all. However, some nonprofits, such as ACTION-Housing, Inc., formed in 1957, began to support resident-led neighborhood regeneration. Faced with demolition, how did human potential and creativity react positively within the framework of urban renewal?

Grassroots preservation movements throughout the United States began primarily as responses to the destructive planning practices of urban renewal. As historic resources and neighborhoods were destroyed, groups of citizens organized both to protest the demolition as well as form groups that would survey, catalogue, and celebrate the existing architectural heritage of cities. This transformation of the redevelopment process in Pittsburgh resulted in part from social programs such as the federal antipoverty program and the Community Renewal Program of the Department of City Planning as well as the upheavals of the 1960's especially surrounding civil rights agitation. At

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<sup>1</sup> No Author, *Memorandum for File*, February 22, 1962. Records of the Buhl Foundation, 1869-1980, MSS #187, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Box 66, Folder 5.

ACTION-Housing this began with Neighborhood Urban Extension in 1960. Urban renewal also caused a neighborhood-centered historic preservation consciousness beginning with the creation of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation in 1964.<sup>2</sup>

Pittsburgh had become a national example of urban change, especially because its urban redevelopment projects undertaken in the late 1940's and 50's were coupled with the city's widespread environmental clean-up. This environmental movement made the urban renewal efforts in Pittsburgh all the more striking. Pittsburgh had been poised to benefit from the federal urban redevelopment funds available under the Housing Act of 1949 (the term "urban renewal" was not used until the Housing Act of 1954) prior to World War II. Under the leadership of David Lawrence, elected as mayor in 1946, Pittsburgh was able to quickly implement its urban redevelopment program largely through the preplanning undertaken in the early 1940's and the investment of local business leaders in building a better Pittsburgh.

While Pittsburgh's first urban redevelopment projects, such as Gateway Center, were primarily commercial developments, the project that began to change the attitudes of both citizens and local leadership was the redevelopment of the Lower Hill. Fearing this primarily African-American residential neighborhood would encroach on the newly revitalized downtown, planners certified the Lower Hill neighborhood as a blighted area and demolished almost 3000 homes and businesses in this once-vibrant, though

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<sup>2</sup> Roy Lubove,. *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, Volume II: The Post-Steel Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996) 69-70.

troubled, neighborhood. A civic arena was constructed which would house the civic light opera, and an expanded arts center and residential development were also planned but never completed.

Based on the perceived success of tearing down blight for neighborhood regeneration, future plans to expand into the Hill District proper were researched extensively by Pittsburgh Department of City Planning but were shelved when citizen protest grew. Hill residents even erected a billboard telling the Urban Redevelopment Authority to leave their neighborhood alone.<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly, national and local publications called into question the tactics used in widespread renewal. Still, in the late fifties and early sixties these projects were believed to be the answer to revitalizing cities. In Pittsburgh, as in many cities across the country, planners, city officials, foundation directors, and other supporters of urban renewal projects were hesitant to change the tactics in which they had already heavily invested.

There were some areas, however, such as housing, which city officials had to address. This issue became a priority due to the displacement of residents in the Lower Hill and documentation reporting the lack of suitable housing available even to middle-class residents in Allegheny County. Housing studies also indicated that much of the substandard residential housing could be rehabilitated, or modernized, which was cheaper than the demolition and subsequent construction of new housing. Still, rehabilitation was seen as a

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Fitzpatrick, "The Story of Urban Renewal," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 21, 2000.

last resort, a method that would not be appropriate for upper income residents but would be acceptable as a solution for the poor who could not afford to maintain their houses. While the mood at the time favored demolishing neighborhoods and building new apartment housing, the availability of funds and the displacement of residents made it an unrealistic solution.

In 1957 the Allegheny Conference on Community Development commissioned a housing study that recommended the formation of a comprehensive civic agency, ACTION-Housing, Inc., to address the housing problem primarily caused by displacement. ACTION-Housing did recommend and finance the construction of new apartments, but they also recognized that neighborhood revitalization went beyond new construction. Citizen participation in urban renewal was viewed as essential to ensure that citizens would be invested in their community and fully utilize and benefit from urban renewal projects.

In order to foster citizen participation in urban redevelopment, ACTION-Housing developed a program entitled Neighborhood Urban Extension. The Homewood-Brushton neighborhood in Pittsburgh was chosen as the Neighborhood Urban Extension pilot project from 1960-1963. In 1963, the program was expanded to include a total of three Pittsburgh neighborhoods. During the pilot program, a need was determined for a citizen-generated neighborhood urban renewal plan. The Department of City Planning supported this initiative by approving the plan as a redevelopment area and thus making it eligible for federal urban renewal funds.

After setting up Neighborhood Urban Extension, ACTION-Housing sought to provide low-to-moderate income housing through large-scale housing rehabilitation. Their pioneering effort was the Cora Street demonstration project in Homewood-Brushton. This twenty-two-unit rehabilitation of townhouses in Homewood-Brushton utilized federal subsidies, available under the Housing Acts of 1961 and 1965, which finally made rehabilitation feasible.

Following the Cora Street project, ACTION-Housing proposed the formation of a corporation that would use a revolving loan fund to do large-scale rehabilitation. ACTION-Housing lobbied local businessmen to invest in the corporation, proposing that this investment would be both profitable and socially conscious. The Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (AHRCO) was formed in 1967.

Primary research for this thesis was conducted in Fall 2007 at the University of Pittsburgh Archives of Industrial Society and the Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Within these archives numerous collections were used, including: The Records of ACTION-Housing, Inc; Records of the Pittsburgh (Pa.) City Planning Commission; Pittsburgh Renaissance Project: The Stanton Belfour Oral History Collection; Records of the Buhl Foundation; Papers of Monsignor Charles Owen Rice; Collection of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, and Records of the Heath and Welfare Planning Association. Cornell University libraries provided surprisingly rich collections of ACTION-Housing Annual Reports and publications of the Pittsburgh City Planning Commission and other related agencies. The author conducted interviews with James Cunningham, former

associate director of ACTION-Housing, Inc.; Arthur P. Ziegler, president and founder of Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation; and Jonathan Zimmer, former executive director of ACTION-Housing, Inc. Finally, ACTION-Housing's current offices house a private collection of materials, including several scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and photographs, as well as one surviving copy of the film, *Cora Street*, which was used to publicize the rehabilitation work done for that project. In April 2008 this film was transferred from 16 mm to DVD and archived at the ACTION-Housing offices. Many publications have been devoted to both the general history of urban renewal, and to the Pittsburgh Renaissance in particular. Historian Roy Lubove has written most extensively about ACTION-Housing's formation and history as a precursor to the community development movement in Pittsburgh. Donald Stevens wrote a case study of ACTION-Housing in 1988 as his dissertation at Carnegie Mellon University. Specifically, Stevens had access to the records of the Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation that were not available for this thesis and proved extremely valuable.

Chapter One of this work outlines the early development of Pittsburgh and describes the progressive movements involved in the planning of the city. This chapter also reviews the first national housing acts that set the stage for urban redevelopment, and the local civic agencies that formed to guide this action locally. Chapter Two covers the two largest urban renewal projects, Gateway Center and the redevelopment of the Lower Hill. The chapter then traces how ACTION-Housing, Inc., was created to address the lack of affordable housing that arose from these renewal efforts. Chapter Three discusses ACTION-Housing's response to the lack of citizen participation in

urban renewal through the creation of Neighborhood Urban Extension, particularly in the primarily African-American neighborhood of Homewood-Brushton. Chapter Four presents a case study of the first rehabilitation project undertaken by ACTION-Housing, on Cora Street in Homewood-Brushton. Finally, Chapter Five provides an overview of the organization's attempt to create a massive program for housing rehabilitation through the formation of the Allegheny County Housing Rehabilitation Corporation. This chapter also includes an overview of similar contemporaneous initiatives that arose in Pittsburgh such as the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation and Neighborhood Housing Services. These early grassroots efforts at neighborhood preservation have been nationally recognized, but what is unique about ACTION-Housing's efforts is how this institutionalized public agency worked within the framework of urban renewal to directly challenge the traditional solutions to disinvestment in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods.

## CHAPTER ONE: PITTSBURGH'S URBAN DEVELOPMENT

### INTRODUCTION

Understanding of the creative responses to urban renewal in the 1950's is aided by a historical overview of how early planning attempted to address similar social conditions. Urban planning began in Pittsburgh as a progressive reform movement to address the problems created by the rapid industrialization of the city. The Pittsburgh Survey was undertaken to assess the housing and social conditions of the working class in 1907. The dire conditions reported in the Survey caused businessmen and local political reformers to form civic agencies to address these issues. These groups proved largely ineffectual at providing concrete solutions, such as adequate housing, and were often short-lived.

While the federal housing acts trace the history of the policies that shaped cities throughout the 1940's, 50's and 60's, these policies grew out of a greater national debate regarding how much involvement the government should have in housing. Issues of overcrowding and tenement reform started much earlier, by the 1930's the jargon of slum clearance was a part of the American vocabulary.

In response to worsening conditions for the poor, especially following the Great Depression, Pittsburgh City Planning efforts in the 1940's demonstrated the common belief that the clearance of slums would create a "rising tide" of vibrant economic areas that would "lift all boats." The formation of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD) in 1943 was an



example of the powerful relationship between local businessmen and government that hoped to shape the future of Pittsburgh's development for the next two decades. This partnership was prepared to make substantial physical changes to Pittsburgh's urban environment even before federal legislation provided the powerful tool of urban redevelopment funds in 1949.

Pittsburgh would soon be seen as a leader in urban redevelopment, largely due to the preparation for large-scale renewal by the ACCD and the leadership of David Lawrence, who was elected mayor in 1946. The early development of Pittsburgh as a sooty industrial city, and the progressive eras that followed were what galvanized these leaders of the 1940's and caused Pittsburgh to be poised for the renewal of the 1950's.

## EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY

Pittsburgh's geographical location at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela, where they unite to form the Ohio River, advanced its early development. Known as the "Forks of the Ohio", this confluence served as the "Gateway to the West."<sup>4</sup> The original settlers to the area were the Adena and Hopewell Native American tribes. Early French and English colonists competed for the land along with these original settlers. The French constructed Fort Duquesne at the "Point," the tip of the triangle of land formed by the rivers. Later, in 1758, the British renamed the French battlement Fort Pitt. Fort Pitt and the city of Pittsburgh derived their names from British Prime Minister William Pitt. Although Western Pennsylvania was originally set aside

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Aurand, *The Spectator and the Topographical City* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) 1.

as Native American territory, in 1768 the lands were opened for colonization and a stream of white settlers moved into the valley.<sup>5</sup>

Early inhabitants were struck not only by the rivers' strength but also by the great geographical variation of the surrounding landscape. Descending the Appalachian Mountains and crossing the 1500 foot-high Allegheny Front, settlers encountered the easternmost portion of the Appalachian Plateau, with flatlands that stretched far into the west. The area, which would later constitute Western Pennsylvania, was anything but flat. Over millions of years the rise and fall of inland seas levels deposited sediment, creating swampland and rich soil conducive to verdant vegetation. Over time, the sediment compressed to create sandstone, shale, and limestone while decomposed vegetation and peat created coal, petroleum, and gas.

This rocky ground eroded into hills and valleys, as streams and rivers moved through in the area. In turn, the earth's crust buckled to form two parallel ridges, running from northeast to southwest, which formed the distinctive "three rivers" geological framework. These ridges were eventually bisected by glaciers, which covered the land to the north and disrupted the rivers' flow. This distinct geological history also created the floodplains that were to form the Point: Pittsburgh's downtown, and the steep bluffs to the north and south that lined the rivers.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Roberts, ed. *Points in Time: Building a Life in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1996) 1-2; John Reys, *Town Planning in Frontier America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press: 1980) 181; Aurand 11.

Fur trappers traded at the Monongahela Wharf on the north shore of the river. This pattern of commerce gave rise to an informal gridiron street pattern crowded with shops, inns and taverns, offices, and residences, all located within the narrow confines of the Point. John Penn was responsible for the earliest planned development, establishing a new baseline parallel to the Allegheny and surveying two avenues, Penn and Liberty, along the new east-west boundary in 1784. The older gridiron development then extended to fill out the downtown. A courthouse square was included in the plan with wider streets measuring 40 to 80 feet and smaller alleys measuring 10 to 20 feet across (Figure 1.1).<sup>6</sup>

Waterways provided the main form of travel to and from the confluence into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1815 downtown development extended beyond the Penn plan and included the small towns of Allegheny and Birmingham that had sprung up north and south of the rivers (Figure 1.2).<sup>7</sup> The completion of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal and the Allegheny Portage Railroad in 1834 allowed much easier access to Pittsburgh from the east and spurred the city's growth.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Reys 181; Joel A. Tarr, ed. *Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003) 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Reys 183; Samuel Harden Church, *A Short History of Pittsburgh: 1758-1908* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1908) 48.

<sup>8</sup> Tarr 14-15.



Figure 1.1: 1787 map showing John Penn's gridiron plan at the Forks of the Ohio. From John Reps, *Town Planning in Frontier America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980) 181.

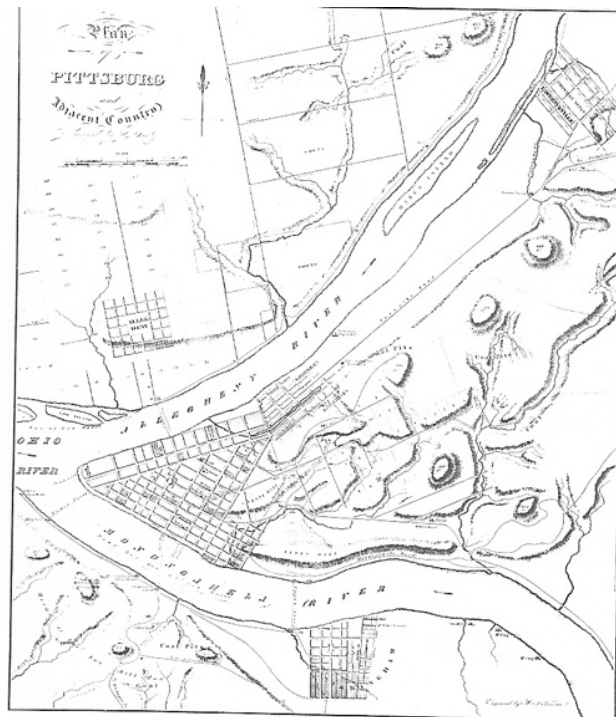


Figure 1.2: 1815 map showing development of the Triangle and the north and south shores. From John Reps, *Town Planning in Frontier America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980) 183.

Emerging from the depression of the 1860's, Pittsburgh was a hub of production for new building technologies such as steel girders and rails, plate glass, and heavy industrial machinery.<sup>9</sup> Although the city's industrial development along its waterfronts was not unique in its location, the geography of the landscape contributed to its growing reputation as a dark and sooty inferno.<sup>10</sup> The high bluffs formed a basin, which confined the industrial smoke and effluents, creating a grim, choking, Dickensian environment. The city planning historian John Reps wrote of Pittsburgh's industrial development, "the drabness of its endless gridiron extensions, stamped on the rugged terrain of the site, was matched by conditions of the atmosphere produced by coal-powered industry (Figure 1.3)."<sup>11</sup>



Figure 1.3: 1904 Film Still: "Welding the Big Rig" workers at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, PA. From <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem>.

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<sup>9</sup> John F. Bauman and Edward K. Muller, eds. *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889-1943* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) 15.

<sup>10</sup> Tarr 20.

<sup>11</sup> Reps 184.

The coal that existed in Western Pennsylvania was in high demand by mid-century. While coal was quickly exported from the area, it was also processed as the major form of carbon in the coking process for iron making. Bituminous coal was distilled at high temperatures in beehive coke ovens that drove out the oils, gases and tars through holes at the top. The residue of high carbon was the main ingredient in iron making. Coke ovens were generally located near the coalmines in the area surrounding the city and shipped by rail and river into the city center for exportation.<sup>12</sup>

In 1802 François Andre Michaux characterized Pittsburgh air as “salubrious,” however the rapid industrialization that followed caused one visitor to describe a view of downtown as “hell with the lid taken off.” Although the health benefits of living in “the smoke” were promoted by some, residents increasingly moved out of the city center. While the population of Pittsburgh increased five-fold from 1850 to 1890, Ward 3, encompassing the largest residential section in downtown, lost three-quarters of its population over the same time period.<sup>13</sup>

By 1898 Pittsburgh’s population was 320,000 and by 1910 the population of the city had grown to 534,000, with 1.6 million residents overall in Allegheny County (Figure 1.4). By the early twentieth century, the Pittsburgh region had developed an economic mix that distinguished it from most other metropolitan

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<sup>12</sup> Tarr 20.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Lubove, ed. *Pittsburgh* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976) 3, 10-11; Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 19, 39.

areas. The city specialized in a limited range of heavy industrial enterprises and the labor force was concentrated near these large plants.<sup>14</sup> Housing for the steel mill workers, an immigrant labor force, was often little more than tenements or wooden shanties thrown together with very little planning. In late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Pittsburgh there was little regard for the poor housing situation of working class residents, and conditions did not improve.<sup>15</sup>

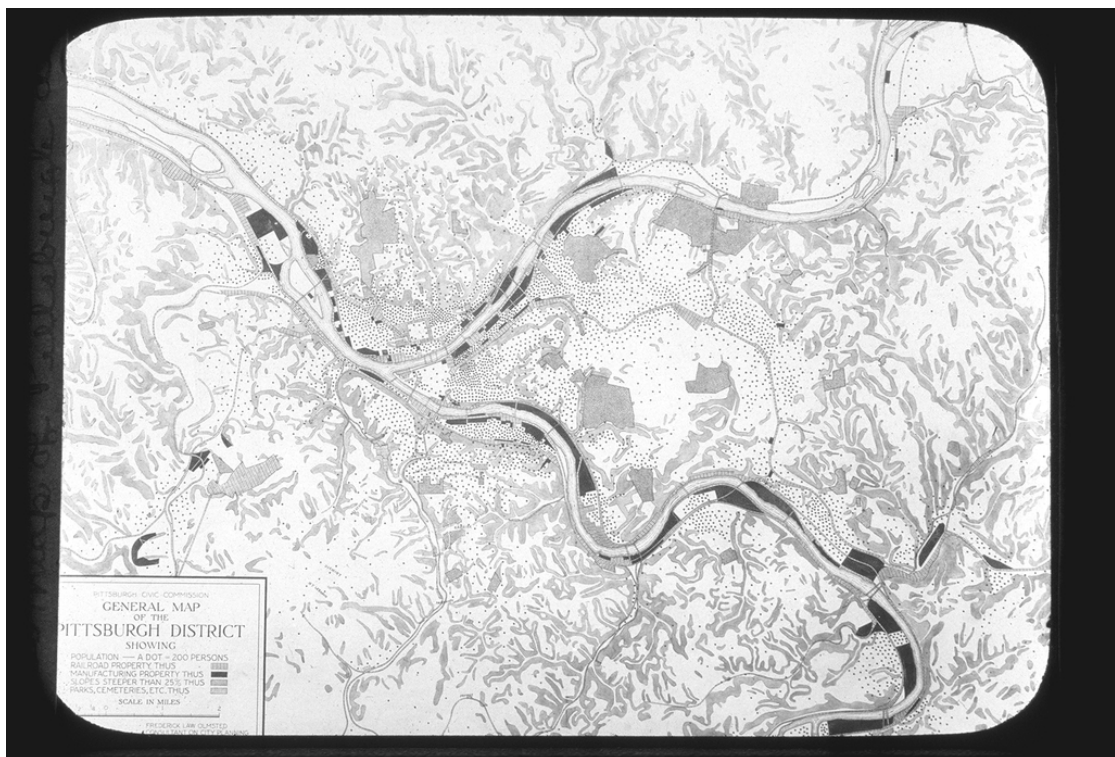


Figure 1.4: 1911 map of Pittsburgh population distribution. From <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem>.

<sup>14</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, Volume I: Government, Business, and Environmental Change*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) 5; Raymond A. Mohl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920* (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1985) 3.

<sup>15</sup> Mohl 3.

Around 1870, African-American migration from the South increased significantly. From 1860 to 1920 the population of African-Americans in Pittsburgh tripled from 2.3 to 6.4%. Pittsburgh was part of the industrial heartland that attracted these out-of-state migrants.<sup>16</sup> African-Americans settled in “islands of population” in such neighborhoods as the Hill District, East Liberty, Homewood, South Side, Manchester, and the Strip (Figure 1.5).<sup>17</sup>

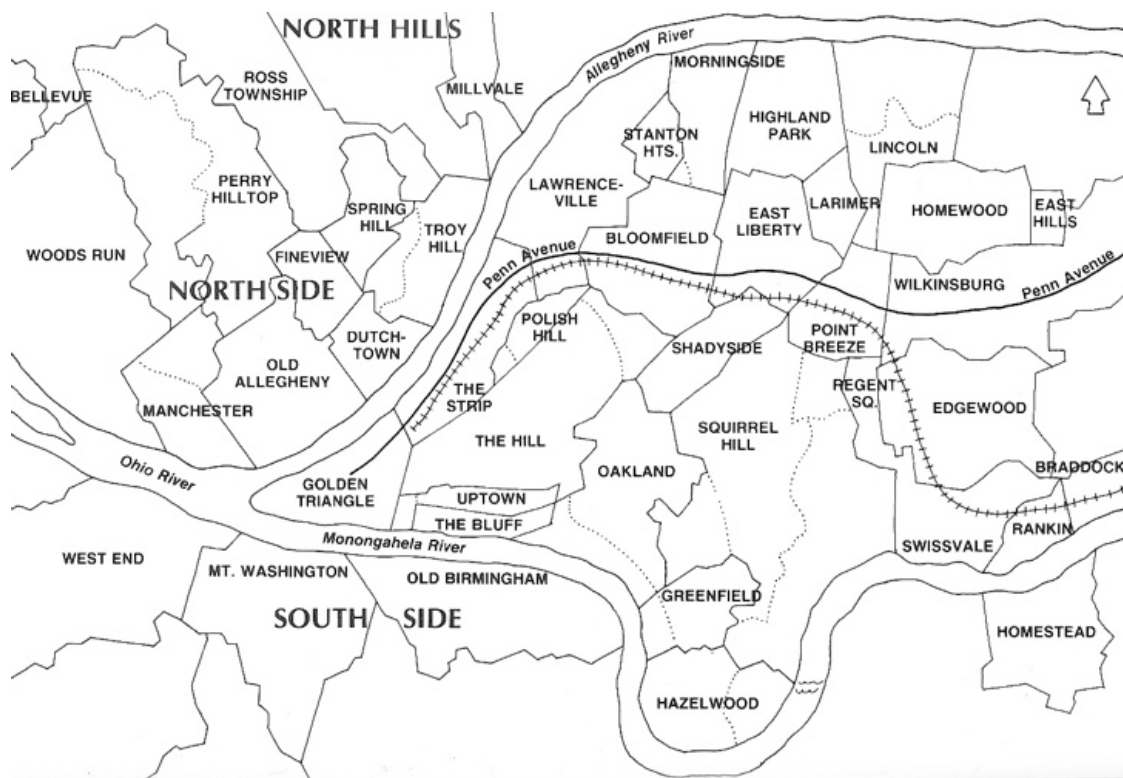


Figure 1.5: Map of Pittsburgh neighborhood locations. From Franklin Toker, *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) vi.

<sup>16</sup> Mohl 21-23.

<sup>17</sup> Laurence A. Glasco, *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004) 24; Joe T. Darden, *Afro-Americans in Pittsburgh: The Residential Segregation of a People* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973) 6.



## INTRODUCTION OF FORMAL PLANNING

When Edward M. Bigelow was appointed city engineer in 1880, he was passionately committed to the city and the well-being of its inhabitants. In 1887, Bigelow's title was changed to director of Public Works and, in this new position, he was able to funnel city council money into acquiring parkland for his Frederick Law Olmsted-inspired emerald "necklace" of parks encircling the city. Bigelow acquired land in outlying neighborhoods, away from the smoky haze of industrialism.<sup>18</sup>

The eastern neighborhood populations of Pittsburgh began growing in the 1860's and 1870's as the horse car, or omnibus, provided accessibility through two main thoroughfares: Penn and Fifth Avenues. While omnibus lines created a link between outlying neighborhoods to the east, a series of funiculars were developed to connect neighborhoods on the north and south slopes. With these new connections, Pittsburgh annexed nearby towns, including Allegheny and Birmingham in 1907, and between 1890 and 1920, the square mileage of the city almost doubled. In his capacity as director of Public Works, Bigelow also contributed improvements to large-scale public infrastructure through water, sewer, and street paving projects. Under Bigelow's instruction, the Department of Public Works undertook the first topographical study of Pittsburgh in 1888, designed to aid in the addition of civic infrastructure.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bauman and Muller 19-21.

<sup>19</sup> Bauman and Muller 19-21, 23; Mohl 29, 33, 39, 63.

As Pittsburgh approached the twentieth century, its leaders strove to keep it competitive with other rapidly growing cities. Major public works projects were also a chance for the corrupt city government to allocate funds and award contract bids within the small elite group in power. This “palm greasing” continued through the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup>

Pittsburgh’s downtown continued to develop, with banks, office buildings, hotels, and department stores being constructed at an average of eighty-six per year between 1888 and 1893, and then slowing due to the 1893 depression to an average of forty between 1894 and 1906 (Figure 1.6).<sup>21</sup> A damaging flood on March 15, 1907 covered an estimated 53% of downtown Pittsburgh. Train service halted, mills shut down, and many workers found themselves temporarily jobless. The national financial panic in 1907 also devastated Pittsburgh’s stock market. These major disasters, combined with the city’s sesquicentennial the following year, set the stage for comprehensive planning in the city. While everyone seemed to agree that a strong planning association would benefit the city, there was a question as to whether this should be designed and implemented under the local government or a civic organization.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bauman and Muller 35.

<sup>21</sup> Mohl 41.

<sup>22</sup> Bauman and Muller 63-64.



Figure 1.6: 1902 Bird's Eye View of Pittsburgh's development. From <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>.

In 1907, following a tide of national social and environmental reform known as Progressivism, the Pittsburgh Survey was implemented. The survey came about because

In the absence of any significant countervailing power, the business leadership was free to shape the life of the region. This had led, by the early twentieth century, to the mutilation and pollution of the physical environment, and to a low priority for housing, health, and social welfare institutions.<sup>23</sup>

A small group of progressive business and welfare leaders designed the survey with the Charities Publication Committee of New York, which had

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<sup>23</sup>Lubove, *Volume I* 6.

conducted a similar survey of social conditions in Washington, D.C. in 1905. Based on the first reports of the surveyors, the scope of the survey was broadened beyond journalistic diagnoses, and the survey, financed by the newly formed Russell Sage Foundation, was presented in November 1908 at the Carnegie Institute (Figure 1.7).<sup>24</sup>

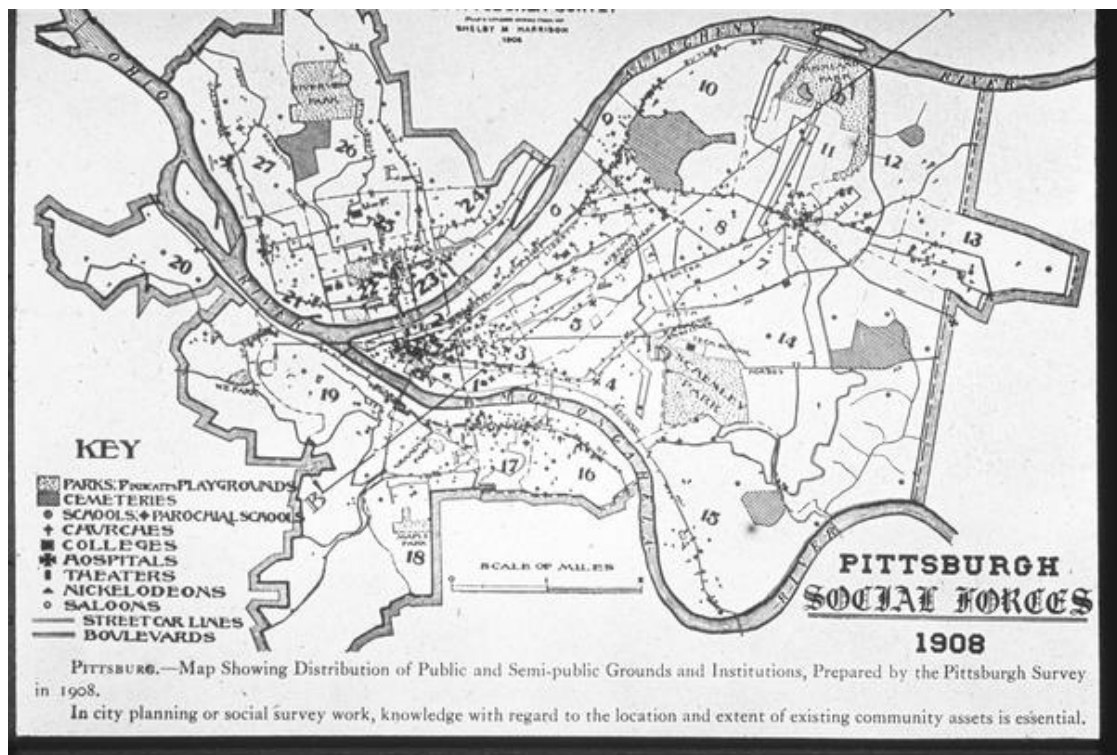


Figure 1.7: “Pittsburgh Social Forces.” 1908 map showing list of social forces measured in the Pittsburgh Survey. From <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

The Pittsburgh Survey was a distinctive experiment in American social and community analysis. Authorities in social welfare had invaded the city and attempted to quantify the social, industrial, and civic issues the city faced. Paul Kellogg, the editor of the survey called it an appraisal stating “democracy

<sup>24</sup> Lubove, *Volume I*; Mohl 172.

must overhaul the social machinery through which it operates if it would bring its community conditions up to standards comparable to those maintained by its banks, its insurance companies, and its industrial corporations.”

Centralization of planning was seen as a way to address the issues of social change that the survey outlined.<sup>25</sup>

The advent of modern urban planning around 1910, an outcome of the “City Beautiful” movement, was galvanized in Pittsburgh by the completion of the Pittsburgh Survey and the realization that conditions of the working-class in Pittsburgh were abominable. Although the growth of Progressivism in this era was characterized by greater appreciation of art and architecture it was also a time of social and spiritual reform. Housing conditions, especially overcrowded tenements, became a central social issue. Urban planning rose as a practical solution to the ills of the modern industrial city.<sup>26</sup>

The then-current administration of Mayor George Guthrie supported planning efforts, but the president of the Chamber of Commerce, H.D.W. English, felt that centralized planning was better left to a commercial organization.<sup>27</sup>

English and others were wary of how they had seen the corrupt local regime allow itself to bend to the will of businessmen; they did not want to see the continued mutilation and pollution of the city through this cycle of public policy.

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<sup>25</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 10.

<sup>26</sup> Bauman and Muller 15; Sherie Mershon, “Corporate Responsibility and Urban Revitalization: The Allegheny Conference on Community Development, 1943-1968” (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2000.) 15-16; Mohl 172; Maurine W. Greenwald and Margo Anderson, eds., *Pittsburgh Surveyed: Social Science and Social Reform in the Early Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996) 160.

English felt that the businessmen would be more successful in implementing the long-term goals of flood control, beautification, and improved social conditions. Mayor Guthrie, entering the final year of his term in 1909, acquiesced to English, appointing him head of the new Pittsburgh Civic Commission (PCC). The PCC's mission was "to plan and promote improvements in civic and industrial conditions which affect the health, convenience, education and general welfare of the Pittsburgh industrial district." Mayor Guthrie did manage a compromise in appointing himself chair of an advisory board to the PCC that also included top names in national reform, including Paul Kellogg.<sup>28</sup>

The PCC had over fourteen committees concerned with the social and political issues outlined in the Pittsburgh Survey. There was also the progressive belief that aesthetic improvements would lead to social reform. In 1910 the PCC hired Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. as a consultant to draft a comprehensive plan for Pittsburgh that affected much of the subsequent planning in the city. Key to Olmsted's scheme for a general plan of downtown was a park at the Point, implementation of which became a central part of Pittsburgh's first urban renewal effort: Gateway Center (Figure 1.8). In 1911 the PCC helped to draft a city charter that included a provision for a permanent City Planning Commission. The PCC mobilized prestigious and powerful members of the business community in a manner that foreshadowed the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, the organization formed in 1943 to shape Pittsburgh's urban redevelopment policy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bauman and Muller 65; Lubove, *Volume I* 24.

<sup>29</sup> Bauman and Muller 77; Lubove, *Volume I* 34; Mershon 20.

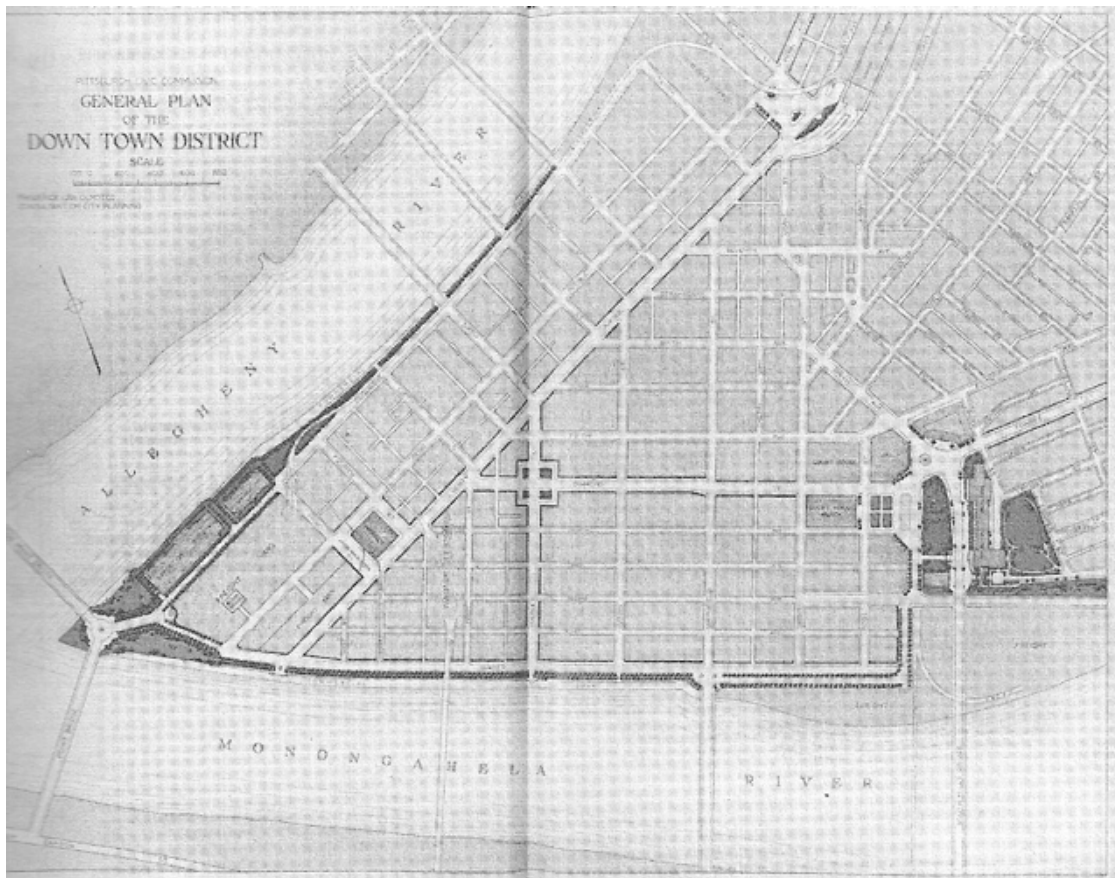


Figure 1.8: 1911 map showing Olmsted, Jr.'s plan for downtown Pittsburgh with greater emphasis on boulevards and parks. From John F. Bauman and Edward K. Muller, eds. *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889-1943* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) 77.

The PCC was responsible for some hard-hitting policies between 1909 and 1911, however it was largely ineffectual after this point. Although planning efforts continued throughout the 1910's and early 1920's, they were shaped by mayoral politics and did not constitute any large-scale projects that affected the city's continuing need for adequate housing, as outlined in the Pittsburgh

Survey, as well as transportation, especially with the advent of the motor car in this same period.<sup>30</sup>

Post-World-War-I planning in Pittsburgh seemed to gain more potency than had been the case in the prior decade. The return of corporate leadership to the planning agenda saw the birth of several planning organizations, most notably the Citizens Committee on the City Plan (CCCP), which later became the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association (PRPA). The ideas of visionaries involved in these new agencies, most prominently Frederick Bigger, who would later shape Pittsburgh and the nation's urban renewal efforts, left their mark on the urban space. Thus, it was the return of the business elite and the acceptance of planning professionals that set the stage for how Pittsburgh would shape its future development.<sup>31</sup>

#### EARLY FEDERAL HOUSING POLICY AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT

During the Great Depression, individual home ownership and mortgage financing fell dramatically. Nationally, President Herbert Hoover focused on the general state of housing by calling a conference in 1931. Before he left office Congress enacted the Federal Home Loan Bank Act of 1932. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board was authorized to extend credit to member home-financing institutions. In 1933 Congress passed the Home Owners' Loan Act, which refinanced mortgages of distressed homebuyers. Both pieces

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<sup>30</sup> Bauman and Muller 100-102; Mershon 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Bauman and Muller 102.



of legislation helped bolster homeownership during times of economic distress but did not attempt an overall federal policy on housing.<sup>32</sup>

President Franklin D. Roosevelt achieved this in his first year in office, when a committee he established to address housing created legislation that became the National Housing Act of 1934. This federal housing legislation provided insurance against loss on property improvement loans, mutual mortgage insurance, and low-cost housing loans up to 80% of appraised value with a 20-year amortization. While this insurance proved successful, the most important aspect of the 1934 Housing Act was the establishment of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).

Public housing was built into Roosevelt's New Deal, and at least 21,769 low-cost housing units were built under the National Industrial Recovery Act. In 1935 "greenbelt" garden towns were developed by the Resettlement Administration, which aimed at creating clean, airy places for residents of the crowded city slums to move. In his second Inaugural Address, Roosevelt famously remarked, "one-third of the nation ill-housed." In the subsequent housing legislation's equivalent elimination clause, one unit of slum housing was to be razed for each new unit of public housing. The 1937 Housing Act provided funds for local housing authorities to construct 117,755 units of public housing.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John B. Willmann, *The Department of Housing and Urban Development* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967) 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> Willmann 10.

Although the idea of equivalent elimination clause in the 1937 Act was an important stepping-stone for the advent of slum clearance, the history of urban renewal is more directly traced to the 1949 Housing Act, enacted under President Truman. The primary difference between the 1937 and 1949 Housing Acts was that the former sought to prevent blight by the construction of low-cost housing, while the latter used the concept of urban redevelopment to combat encroaching slums. Urban redevelopment could include commercial or industrial redevelopment of formerly residential land as a means of revitalizing a predetermined area, and, by default, the surrounding neighborhoods.

A dozen years stand between the 1937 and 1949 legislation, but as early as 1941 urban redevelopment was institutionally recommended as a tool for combating slums. In that year Frederick Bigger, who was an early member of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) and would shape Pittsburgh's development through the City Planning Commission (CPC) from the 1920's to the 1950's, was the author of the Federal Housing Administration's "A Handbook on Urban Redevelopment for Cities in the United States." The Handbook provided an outline to follow for the prevention and elimination of blight with such chapters as "Basic Premises in Rehabilitation and Redevelopment."<sup>34</sup> Bigger's early involvement in shaping both federal and local policy suggests that both governments were aware of early attempts to combat blight. At the local level, this meant that Pittsburgh

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<sup>34</sup> James Q. Wilson. *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966) 72; Bauman and Muller 267; Federal Housing Administration, "A Handbook on Urban Redevelopment for Cities in the United States," Digital Library of India <http://www.new.dli.ernet.in/> (accessed 2/17/08).

was particularly prepared to take advantage of urban redevelopment funds as they became available.

The Handbook recommended large-scale redevelopment projects as the best way to eliminate slums. Bigger emphasized the need for citizens to be involved in the planning process and to direct expansion and rehabilitation. Bigger also stated in “Some Guiding Principles for Effective Procedure” that the projects should probably include substantial quantities of housing but that low-income rental housing should not make up the majority of the project because the inhabitants would not be able to take advantage of the newly constructed amenities relating to the projects. Instead, Bigger thought that housing should be built for families from all ranges of income. The Handbook also recommended using eminent domain as a tool for acquiring property for large-scale redevelopments.<sup>35</sup>

Also influential in this new model for revitalization was a pamphlet published by the National Planning Association in December 1941. “Urban Redevelopment and Housing” by Guy Greer and Alvin H. Hansen outlined nine points for a way of “replanning by the cities and of rebuilding by private enterprise.”<sup>36</sup> Two obstacles to achieving neighborhood revitalization were the lack of local governmental control of land use and the frozen status of high land costs in slums and blighted areas. Eight of the nine points outlined in the Greer/Hansen publication appeared in the 1949 Housing Act. Greer and

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<sup>35</sup> Wilson 73; Federal Housing Administration, “A Handbook on Urban Redevelopment for Cities in the United States.”

<sup>36</sup> Wilson 73.

Hansen had also outlined a long-term federal subsidy that would be used for redevelopment, however the 1949 Housing Act instead provided a lump sum federal capital grant to defray two-thirds of the net project cost.

Between 1943 and 1945 two bills were introduced in Congress, addressing the idea of a long-term federal loan to be made to cities. These bills drew the attention of the Subcommittee on Urban Redevelopment of the Senate Special Committee on Post-War Economic Policy and Planning. Chaired by Senator Taft, extensive and unusually searching hearings were conducted on the issues of housing and urban redevelopment. The final report was published on August 1, 1945, entitled *Postwar Housing*. This report called for “The establishment, on a provisional basis, of a new form of assistance to cities in ridding themselves of unhealthful housing conditions and of restoring blighted areas to productive use by private enterprise.”<sup>37</sup>

The implementation of the federal subsidy required four years of struggle for enactment. Various bills were proposed and struck down. Although the housing crisis was generally considered a national emergency, the bills were fought by almost every national trade organization concerned with residential housing. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 is largely credited with creating urban renewal in America. Its influence on city planning and federal policy toward redevelopment cannot be underestimated. In Pittsburgh, the effect of the 1949 Act largely bolstered a renewal program that had begun to take shape in the early 1940's.

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<sup>37</sup> Wilson 76-77.

## EARLY URBAN REDEVELOPMENT IN PITTSBURGH

Locally, disinvestment, and worsening economic conditions during the Great Depression, followed by increased pollution and industrial waste during World War II, increased the need for planning groups such as the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association (PRPA). While conditions were dire, they had been so for so long that the future steps taken by civic groups for reform must have been affected by the national impact of the New Deal.<sup>38</sup>

By December 1943 Pittsburgh's two official planning organizations had unveiled a \$900,000,000 postwar plan for Pittsburgh that included 147 projects, many of them transportation related. Planned redevelopment of the Lower Hill was included, and the establishment of a "Point Park," as outlined in Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s plan, was considered a priority.<sup>39</sup> This was also the year that the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD) was founded. By establishing this more disciplined and more action-oriented planning organization Pittsburgh's elite members of the PRPA were setting up the scaffold for urban renaissance.<sup>40</sup> Not yet vested with the authority in Pennsylvania law for establishing urban redevelopment authorities, Pittsburgh's elite formed their own.<sup>41</sup> This private, business-sponsored, civic association would have a great impact on Pittsburgh planning, including the formation of ACTION-Housing, Inc.

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<sup>38</sup> Mershon 22.

<sup>39</sup> Bauman and Muller 269.

<sup>40</sup> Bauman and Muller 269-270.

<sup>41</sup> Mershon 24.

Pittsburgh's redevelopment agenda was hastened at the state level by the passage of the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law on May 24, 1945.

The Urban Redevelopment Law was enacted

to promote elimination of blighted areas and supply sanitary housing in areas throughout the Commonwealth; by declaring acquisition, sound replanning and redevelopment of such areas to be for the promotion of health, safety, convenience and welfare.<sup>42</sup>

The Law also vested power to local redevelopment authorities to engage in the elimination of blighted areas by redevelopment through partnerships with private enterprise and the exercise of eminent domain.<sup>43</sup> Pittsburgh's City Planning Commission (CPC) began to develop a framework for urban renewal well before the passage of the 1949 Housing Act. The passage of the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law in 1945 "gave teeth" to the Pittsburgh Master Plan developed by the CPC by lawfully establishing urban redevelopment authorities, the use of eminent domain and public/private partnerships.

In 1939 the PRPA hired Robert Moses to prepare an "Arterial Plan for Pittsburgh." Pittsburgh transportation issues were seen as central to the improvement of conditions in downtown. Moses stated in his report that "the

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<sup>42</sup> City Planning Commission, *Pittsburgh: Groundwork and Inventory for the Master Plan* (Pittsburgh: 1945) 165.

<sup>43</sup> City Planning Commission, *Pittsburgh: Groundwork and Inventory for the Master Plan* (Pittsburgh: 1945) 165.

basic assumption of the sponsors of this report was that the Triangle was to be preserved and made attractive by means of arterial, park, and other improvements.”<sup>44</sup> Moses apparently reiterated what planners such as Bigger had seen as a major hurdle in downtown redevelopment by calling for the elimination of railroad facilities at the point.<sup>45</sup> Included in his arterial plan, projects such as a Point Park, downtown redevelopment, and slum clearance of the Lower Hill would serve as the connections between these new avenues of transportation.<sup>46</sup>

Planning for the postwar era was a pivotal moment in Pittsburgh’s urban redevelopment history as demonstrated by the City Planning Commission Annual Reports beginning in 1940. While the 1940 report shows the body as still focused on Moses’ Arterial Plan, undertaking primarily highway, boulevards, landscaping and riverfront improvements, the CPC was working with the Pittsburgh Housing Authority (PHA) for potential public housing sites.<sup>47</sup> An overview of the evolution of national planning history in the 1941 Annual Report acknowledged that planning was more than just a “plan upon the land.” Items that were now central to city planning included the interdependence of various means of transportation and their relation to the use of land as well as economic shifts due to decentralization, the formulation of urban land policies, as well as better management and autonomy of city government. The report also stated that “on the horizon of City Planning are

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<sup>44</sup> Moses Arterial Plan as quoted in Lubove, *Volume I* 103.

<sup>45</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 104.

<sup>46</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 105.

<sup>47</sup> City Planning Commission, *1944 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 14.

problems relating to the individual man, namely: (1) racial heterogeneity; (2) insecurity; and (3) unemployment.” The CPC’s major contact with the federal government at this point was through the leveraging of funds for major public works improvements.

On January 28, 1942, Mayor Joseph Scully held a conference on postwar development that included the recommendation of studies “for the preparation of plans for future housing projects and for neighborhood rehabilitation to be carried out by the Pittsburgh Housing Authority.” This was the first major initiative of the era to address the inadequate housing issue. Although the war was not over, on November 10, 1942, the mayor included the following statement in his annual budget:

The City Government will fail in its duties to the people of Pittsburgh, should it let these war years go by without concern for the future, when far-reaching post-war re-adjustments must be made.<sup>48</sup>

This statement translated into immediate action on the part of the CPC, who sent, just days later, a letter to the City Council with the announcement that they had prepared construction drawings and specifications that were ready for bidding the day the war is over. This report was also the first time a category was created for urban redevelopment projects through the CPC. The report stated:

. . . urban redevelopment is expected to represent a large percentage of the annual national construction program in

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<sup>48</sup> City Planning Commission, *1942 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 10.



the years following the war. Practically every city in the country has large areas near the heart of the city in which practically all the buildings have lived their lives and are in need to replacement.<sup>49</sup>

Another criticism that was leveled at the slated areas was that there were too many streets and alleys that required costly public infrastructure and maintenance. The Report stated “such matters should be taken into account in any replanning and rebuilding.” A map of the Terrace Village I and II, a public housing project developed by the Pittsburgh Housing Authority celebrated the reduction in street area by 59.5% (Figure 1.9). The authors of the Report concluded by acknowledging that following the war the city should be prepared to take advantage of the large federal subsidy that they anticipated would be made available for redevelopment.<sup>50</sup>

The redevelopment of the Lower Hill District was highlighted as a separate postwar planning project and the CPC planned to evaluate the costs associated with acquiring privately owned lands to add to the open areas that were available for rebuilding. Again, the need for a reduction in the road scheme of the new development was highlighted. A study of the potential redevelopment area estimated that the street area could be reduced 60%.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> City Planning Commission, *1942 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 14.

<sup>50</sup> City Planning Commission, *1942 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 14.

<sup>51</sup> City Planning Commission, *1942 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 26.

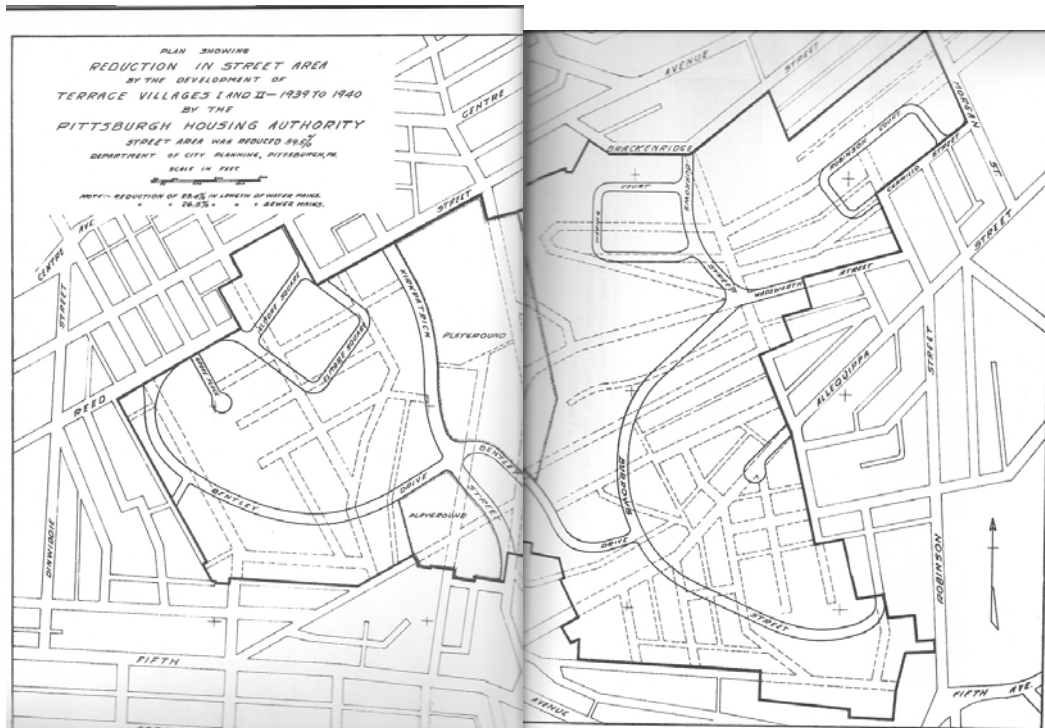


Figure 1.9: Map of Terrace Village I and II showing street reduction and calculating percent savings on public infrastructure. From City Planning Commission, *1942 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 22-23.

By 1944, the “Postwar Construction Program” had evolved into “The Pittsburgh Plan” based on the recommendations of Mayor Scully and City Council in 1942. Through mapping and survey work the CPC had developed “improvement districts” within the city that were categorized as either residential, commercial, or industrial in character. Early maps of these efforts show that almost every acre of buildable land was considered as an improvement district (Figure 1.10). Exempt from this evaluation were major thoroughfares, parks, cemeteries, and the steep hillsides that would be infeasible for development. Planners were also studying the use of buffer or separator strips of different kinds “surrounding, and offering a measure of



the same year the Moses plan was released. The objective of the Division was to “crystallize citizen effort behind a movement to stop depreciation of real estate values within the Golden Triangle by making it a better place in which to work and transact business.”<sup>53</sup> As World War II intensified impending economic crises, R.K. Mellon realized that these projects could not be implemented voluntarily.<sup>54</sup>

Richard King Mellon had assumed control of the Mellon family enterprises in the late 1930's as a younger group of leaders was emerging as Pittsburgh's corporate elite. This new generation was concerned with what they saw as an impending crisis to Pittsburgh's industry as both environmental and social conditions worsened. Mellon had become president of the PRPA in 1941 at the behest of its director, Wallace Richards. Mellon convened a group of corporate leaders as well as planning professionals in 1943 to further discuss Pittsburgh's future. At this meeting, the idea of forming “a non-profit, non-partisan civic organization, to be devoted to research and planning, to develop an over all community improvement program” came to fruition as the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD).<sup>55</sup>

The Allegheny Conference on Community Development was born of a complex web of civic and planning associations that had pursued various planning objectives over the previous decade and were looking for a way to

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<sup>53</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 105.

<sup>54</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 105.

<sup>55</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 108; Arnold J. Auerbach, “The Pattern of Community Leadership in Urban Redevelopment: A Pittsburgh Profile” ( PhD Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1961) 61-63.

organize for a shared postwar planning agenda for Pittsburgh. On the surface the goals of Mellon's group were similar to past business agenda based organizations. However, the policy that members of the executive committee participate personally in deliberations, as citizens rather than representatives of their various corporations insured that the full potential of the organization would be exercised. The ACCD also started at an early stage to utilize the skills of more technical resources to conduct research, including the PRPA. This use of technical resources gave shape to concrete plans that set it apart from earlier organizational efforts (Figure 1.11).<sup>56</sup>

The ACCD worked closely with the City Planning Commission as both undertook research and evaluation for large-scale renewal efforts. In this same period, the St. Louis City Plan Commission turned to Pittsburgh to join in support of "an act by Congress requiring federal insurance of not less than one living unit in the central (obsolete or blighted) areas of cities for each new living unit insured in outlying areas" in October of 1944.

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<sup>56</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 110.

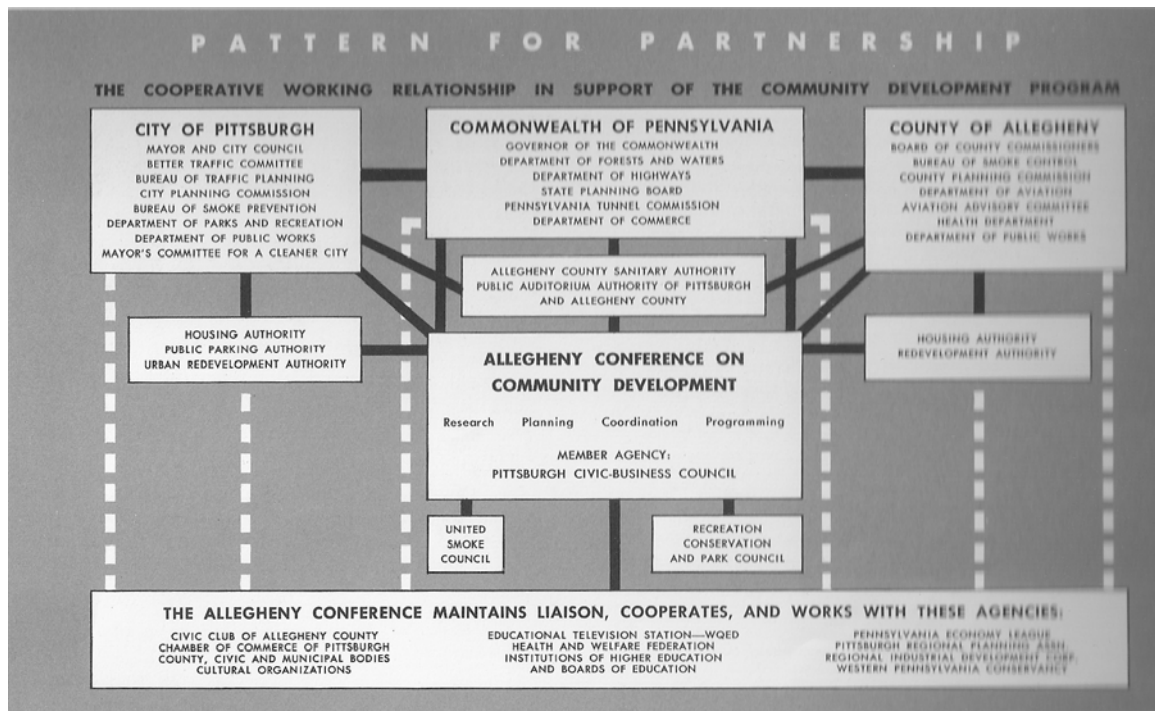


Figure 1.11: Organization of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development with relationships to city departments. From Allegheny Conference on Community Development, "Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Planning to Reality" (Pittsburgh, 1956) 5.

The St. Louis City Plan Commission was in essence asking Pittsburgh to support the opposite of the "equivalent elimination" clause of the 1937 Housing Act. Instead of one unit of slum housing razed for each unit of public housing constructed, St. Louis was asking the federal government to insure one unit of central city housing for each that was insured in the suburbs. Planners in St. Louis felt that the substantial population increase in outlying suburbs, and therefore decrease in the central city, was direct result of an increase in insurance mortgage loans. St. Louis planners also pointed out that Title III of the Housing Act provided for up to \$50,000,000 in the insurance of individual loans on large-scale housing projects. St. Louis felt that their proposal, combined with the availability of federal money would lead to

“experimentation and action that would be of incalculable benefit to our cities.”<sup>57</sup>

The Pittsburgh City Planning Commission gave St. Louis’ proposal “brief but intensive consideration.” Frederick Bigger wrote, in a letter on behalf of the CPC, that this type of Federal legislation would be “hazardous” to private investment and “without municipal willingness and ability to exercise its own powers to the limit, and extend them if necessary.” The CPC acknowledged that decentralization was a problem, but believed that local funds combined with private investment would mitigate the problem.<sup>58</sup>

The City Planning Commission received over \$35,000 from a city ordinance in 1944 towards the continuing development and implementation of the Master Plan. The first report on the Master Plan was released to affiliated organizations throughout the close of 1944 and into early 1945. The plan was presented on January 2<sup>nd</sup> to the ACCD.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> E.J. Russell, St. Louis City Plan Commission to Pittsburgh City Planning Commission, October 24, 1944. Records of the Pittsburgh (Pa.) City Planning Commission, 1928-1962, ais197617, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh: This collection has been previously cited as Minutes and Reports of the City of Pittsburgh Planning Commission, 1940-1959, ais 76:17, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>58</sup> E.J. Russell, St. Louis City Plan Commission to Pittsburgh City Planning Commission, October 24, 1944. Records of the Pittsburgh (Pa.) City Planning Commission, 1928-1962, ais197617, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>59</sup> City Planning Commission, *1945 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 21.

Mayor David Lawrence, seen by many as the father of Pittsburgh's Renaissance, was elected in 1946. One of Mayor Lawrence's first acts as mayor was establishing the Urban Redevelopment Authority and appointing himself chairman in November 1946. The new Urban Redevelopment Authority would use the powers vested by the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945 to proceed with the improvement districts outlined in the Master Plan.<sup>60</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Early progressive reform in Pittsburgh made some distinct changes to the urban landscape but failed to substantially affect social and economic conditions of the poor. Following World War II, the need for increased transportation, commercial development and housing for returning soldiers, paved the way for the Housing Act of 1949. In Pittsburgh, disinvestment in the city center, as well as worsening economic and environmental conditions caused local business leaders to act. Influential men formed the Allegheny Conference on Community Development which would eventually work with the Urban Redevelopment Authority to implement large-scale urban redevelopment and environmental clean-up in Pittsburgh under the leadership of Mayor David Lawrence.

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<sup>60</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 122.



CHAPTER TWO:  
THE FORMATION OF ACTION-HOUSING, INC.  
OR,  
A FRAMEWORK FOR PRESERVATION

INTRODUCTION

Utilizing the authority granted by the 1945 Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law and the federal subsidies available under Title I of the 1949 Housing Act, the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the City Planning Commission undertook several major redevelopment projects in the 1950's. Two of these projects, Gateway Center and the Lower Hill Redevelopment Area exemplified two distinct types of urban redevelopment: the use of private enterprise to revitalize the central business district and the large-scale clearance of a residential neighborhood for a public use cultural center.

The perceived success of Gateway Center in revitalizing the central business district hastened the Lower Hill Redevelopment Plan, as city officials feared the adjacent blighted neighborhood jeopardized the value of their investment. Urban renewal projects, as they were formally called under the Housing Act of 1954, that involved the large-scale demolition of people's homes, became increasingly criticized in the late 1950's. In Pittsburgh, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD) worked to address this growing concern by forming ACTION-Housing, Inc. in 1957. The purpose of this new organization was to solve the relocation issue by building new housing units as well the rehabilitation of structurally sound housing in aging neighborhoods to prevent the necessity for clearance of the homes.

## GATEWAY CENTER

On March 21, 1947, Frederick Bigger sent a “strictly confidential” memo to each member of the City Planning Commission (CPC). Bigger, who was still serving as the commission’s chairman, stated that Mayor Lawrence would like the CPC to declare the lower part of the downtown a “blighted area.” Bigger wrote “you will recall that this area is that for which Mr. Park H. Martin (acting as Director of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development) on June 4, 1946 asked the CPC and Department to prepare a general plan.” Bigger went on to cite the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945 as vesting power for the Commission to certify blighted areas, and highlighted Section 10 of the Urban Redevelopment Law: “Preparation and Adoption of Redevelopment Proposal.” Part ‘a’ of Section 10 states, “An Authority shall prepare a redevelopment proposal for any area certified by the planning commission to be a redevelopment area and for which the planning commission has made a redevelopment plan.”<sup>61</sup>

Based on the preparation of the CPC in creating improvement districts prior to the passage of the 1945 Urban Redevelopment Law, the CPC, ACCD and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) were ready to begin work on Gateway Center in 1947. The 59-acre redevelopment area was certified in March, shortly after Bigger’s memo to the CPC. The project included a 23-acre private

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<sup>61</sup> Frederick Bigger to City Planning Commission, Memorandum, March 21, 1947. Records of the Pittsburgh (Pa.) City Planning Commission, 1928-1962, ais197617, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh: This collection has been previously cited as Minutes and Reports of the City of Pittsburgh Planning Commission, 1940-1959, ais 76:17, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh. Box 1, Volume 11.

development as well as a 36-acre set-aside for Point Park. The URA negotiated a contract with Equitable Life to invest in the project with a guaranteed long-term lease for 60% of the projected office space. Nine of the largest companies in Pittsburgh, including Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Westinghouse, and Jones and Laughlin committed equity in exchange for twenty-year leases in the new buildings. According to Arthur Van Buskirk, “the whole program was put together before a single shovel of earth was turned.” Because of the powerful influence of the ACCD on local corporate leadership, no federal aid was needed to finance the project.<sup>62</sup>

The shovels broke ground on May 18, 1950, shortly following approval by the mayor and city council for the project. The project illustrated both the power of local civic coalitions in generating large-scale change, but also the reliance on the “trickle-down” theory of urban renewal. While the Le Corbusier-inspired office towers that were constructed gave a new face to the Golden Triangle, the contingencies in the plan for smoke and flood control in the city made an immediate difference in air quality and public safety (Figures 2.1-4).

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<sup>62</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, Volume I: Government, Business, and Environmental Change*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) 123; Bigger to City Planning Commission Memorandum, March 21, 1947; “Four Decades of Public-Private Partnerships in Pittsburgh” by Shelby Stewman and Joel Tarr in R. Scott Fosler and Renee A. Berger. *Public-Private Partnership in American Cities: Seven Case Studies* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1982) 74-75. Constance B. Schulz and Steven W. Plattner, eds., *Witness to the Fifties* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999) 60.



Figures 2.1-4: Images of demolition and construction of the office towers for Gateway Center and clearance of the point for Point State Park (ca. 1951). From the online Collection of The Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Collection number MSP285.B006.F20.I04).

Figures 2.1-4 (Continued).



The immediate positive publicity surrounding Gateway Center allowed the agencies to move forward with their next projects: studies for transit expansion, the addition of six garages under the direction of the Pittsburgh Parking Authority, as well as Mellon Square Garage, a park with underground parking built with a \$4 million donation from the Mellon Foundation. A parking study of the downtown completed in 1946 for the ACCD asked “. . .are we to try to preserve our cities as we know them, or are the natural forces of decentralization . . . to be permitted to go along unchecked by remedial efforts?”<sup>63</sup>

### REDEVELOPMENT AREA NO. 3: THE LOWER HILL

Although redevelopment of the Lower Hill district, adjacent to the downtown had been considered as early as 1939 in Robert Moses' Arterial Plan, the early efforts of the ACCD, CPC and URA had focused on the visibility of renewal in the Golden Triangle and creating lasting environmental change. The perceived success of Gateway Center allowed the agencies to move forward with their next project: the demolition of the Lower Hill district and the planned construction of a Civic Arena, Arts Center, and high-income housing. Formal planning for redevelopment of the Lower Hill began in 1942 when a partial study by the CPC determined that 60% of the street area would be reduced by the replanning of the area, leading to savings on public utilities and greater ease of travel throughout the area adjacent to downtown. While the CPC acknowledged the area was in need of redevelopment it was not until

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<sup>63</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 126.

much later that an arts complex was proposed for the area and financing was put together for the project.<sup>64</sup>

It is an oversimplification to state that the Lower Hill district was demolished to build a new Civic Arena for Pittsburgh. In early 1946, Edgar Kaufman, a local department store magnate and loyal patron of the arts, offered the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera \$500,000 to build a new municipal outdoor amphitheater. Mayor David Lawrence quickly matched the gift by issuing municipal bonds. Kaufman asked the ACCD to be the corporate sponsor and a committee of ACCD members worked with the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association (PRPA) to conduct the initial site selection. Of several site conditions assessed, those considered the most important were access by streetcar to the amphitheater, outdoor noise levels, and adequate parking. Of the thirteen sites that were evaluated, the PRPA ranked the Lower Hill as number two, while the CPC later ranked it eleventh, with the neighborhood of Highland Park ranked at number one (Figure 2.5-6).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> City Planning Commission, *1942 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 26.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory J. Crowley, *The Politics of Place: Contentious Urban Redevelopment in Pittsburgh*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005) 60-65; City Planning Commission, *Municipal Outdoor Amphitheater Sites: Staff Report, December 13, 1949*. Records of the Pittsburgh (Pa.) City Planning Commission, 1928-1962, ais197617, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 3, Folder 13.

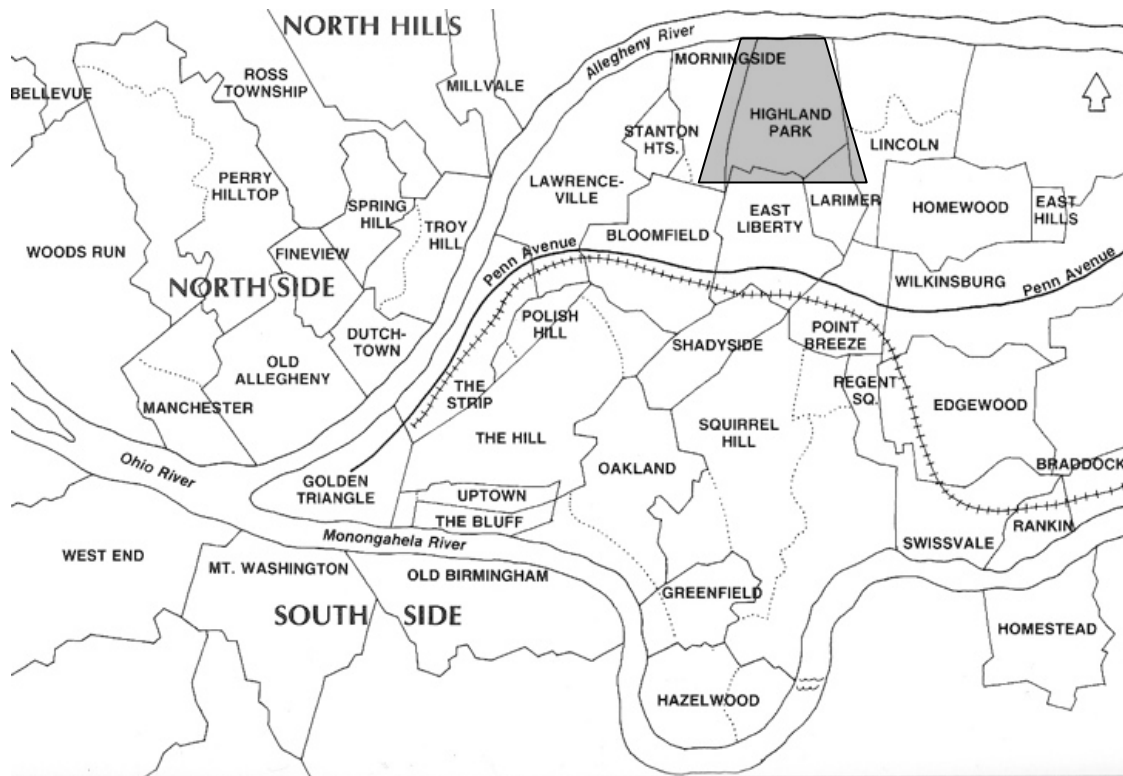


Figure 2.5: Neighborhood map with Highland Park highlighted and ranking of municipal outdoor amphitheater sites. From Franklin Toker, *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) vi

By 1949, city surveyors and engineers were conducting assessments around the Highland Park neighborhood and their appearance led to panic on the part of neighborhood residents, who formed a committee to protest the redevelopment project. On July 5, 1949, City Councilman A. I. Wolk introduced an ordinance “authorizing the taking, using, appropriating and condemning by the City of Pittsburgh” six acres of land in the neighborhood. In opposition, neighborhood residents circulated petitions, held meetings and collected ten dollars per household to hire an attorney. The attorney, Vincent J. Burke, claimed that the condemnation would destroy the “tranquil and pleasant” nature of Highland Park, decrease property values, decrease the availability of parking, and enjoyment of front porches. The City Council



agreed to a request from Burke to hold a public meeting based on the swift reaction from residents. Although the 300 “boisterous and unruly” residents who attended the meeting surely made an impact on the City Council, Burke argued that the city could not legally use eminent domain in taking property for the “amusement purposes” of a civic amphitheater.

Rankings Rearranged  
Dept. of City Planning  
October 1, 1949

COMPARISON OF SITES FOR CIVIC LEISURE AREA DEVELOPMENT

Site Characteristic	Highland Park King Property Near Fin Blvd. - Bickel's Field	Prich Field developed area Former Ball Game - Schenley	Schenley Park #1 Near 22nd Interchange East end of Schenley Pl.	Schenley Park #2 Near 22nd Interchange West end of Schenley Pl.	Schenley Park #3 Open Center of Schenley Park	Schenley Park #4 Derry Hill Site	Silverview Park	Schenley Park #5	Silver Lake	Chianti St.	Lower Hill	Monument Hill	Point Park	Greensview	North Side	Schenley Park West of Oval
1. Freedom from noise	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	2	3	2	3	1	3	2	
2. Setting and Environment	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	
3. Integration with traffic pattern	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	
4. Integration with public improvement program	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	
5. Effect on surrounding Area	3	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	3	3	3	
6. Availability of site	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	2	5	3	3	2	
7. Topographic and architectural adaptability	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	
8. Accessibility by transit	5	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	5	3	5	3	3	
9. Accessibility by automobile	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	5	2	3	
10. Adequacy of potential off-street parking space	5	4	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	
TOTAL	42	40	40	39	39	37	36	34	30	30	30	30	28	25	24	
RANK	1	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	7	7	7	8	9	10	

Note: For each individual rating, 5 is top score  
Highest total score shows most favorable site.

Rated by Staff of Pittsburgh  
Regional Planning Association  
Rankings Rearranged By Dept. of City Planning Dec. 1, 1949  
Totals and Rank are not affected thereby.

Figure 2.6: Ranking of municipal outdoor amphitheater sites. From City Planning Commission, *Municipal Outdoor Amphitheater Sites: Staff Report*, December 13, 1949. Records of the Pittsburgh (Pa.) City Planning Commission, 1928-1962, ais197617, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, Box 3, Folder 13.

The City Council still passed Wolk’s ordinance two weeks later, and Burke filed a lawsuit against the city. In the weeks following the Council’s decision,

*The Pittsburgh Press* published numerous opinion letters denouncing the administration. The letters came from all over the city and expressed outrage at the city's use of power to take a citizen's property. Mayor Lawrence reversed his opinion that Highland Park should be the site for the amphitheater.

The CPC began conducting a study for site alternatives at the same time as concrete redevelopment plans for the Lower Hill were taking place. The long-planned redevelopment of the Lower Hill was formally adopted as Redevelopment Area No. 3 on May 25, 1951. In 1953, the ACCD and the CPC released a study that redefined the Civic Light Opera amphitheatre as a "civic arena," and part of a larger cultural center. The plan called for "redevelopment of a portion of the site to provide a higher classification of housing in proximity to [the] downtown commercial core."<sup>66</sup> New upper-class housing, the civic arena and cultural center would displace 1,551 families; almost 8,000 people, 80% of them African-American. (Figures 2.7-9)<sup>67</sup>

The final Redevelopment Area Plan for the Lower Hill was adopted by the CPC on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1955 for submittal to the Federal Housing and Home Finance Administration (FHHFA) which awarded the project \$17.4 million in loans and an \$8 million capital grant for the project. Preparation for the clearance and

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<sup>66</sup> City Planning Commission, *Municipal Outdoor Amphitheater Sites: Staff Report*.

<sup>67</sup> Sherie Mershon, "Corporate Responsibility and Urban Revitalization: The Allegheny Conference on Community Development, 1943-1968" (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2000) 516, 521.

rebuilding of the Lower Hill had taken almost fifteen years. The demolition of the neighborhood began in 1956 (Figures 2.10-11).<sup>68</sup>

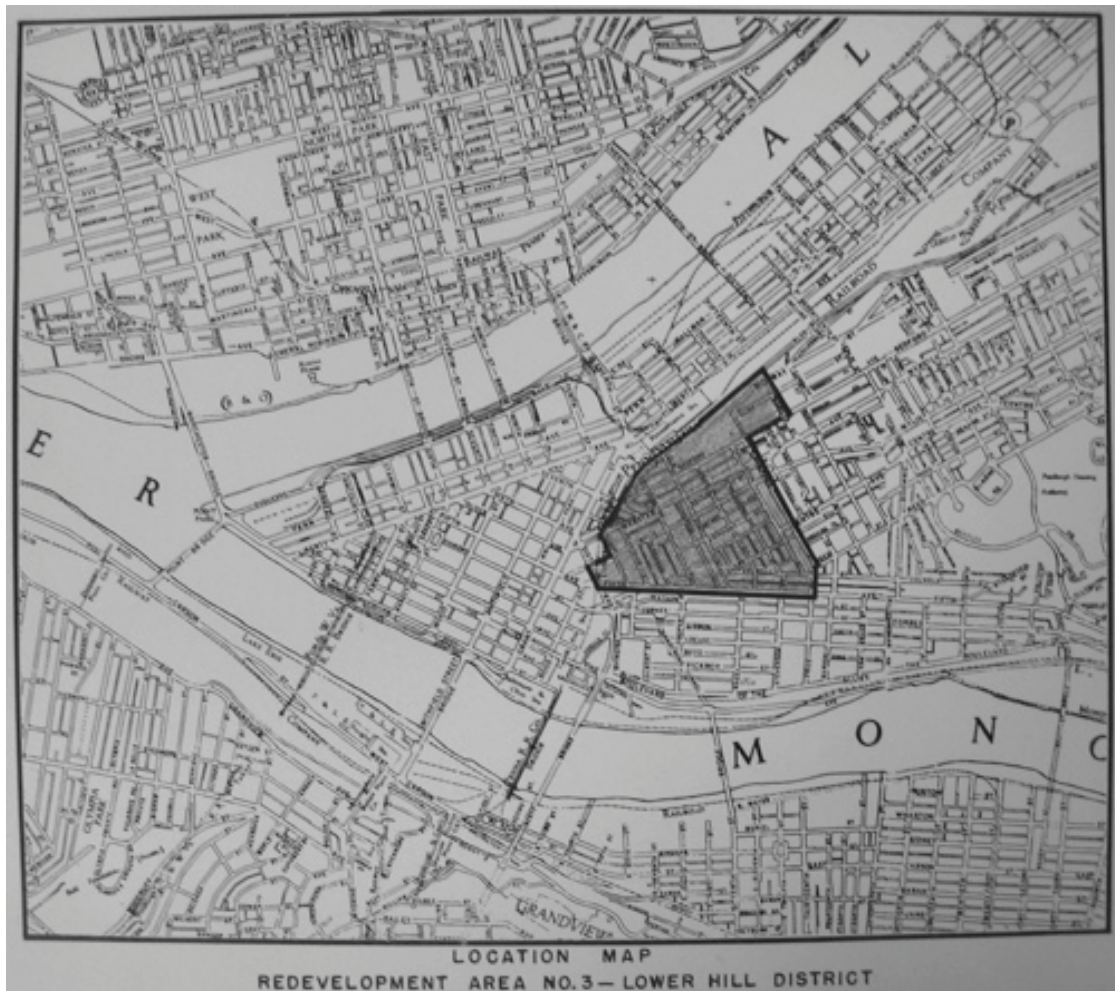


Figure 2.7: Location map of Redevelopment Area No. 3 with delineation of area to be redeveloped. From Pittsburgh Planning Commission, "Redevelopment Area Plan for Redevelopment Area No. 3" (Pittsburgh, PA: June 7, 1955) Exhibit A.

<sup>68</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 131; Crowley 83.



Figures 2.8-9: Designs for the Lower Hill Cultural Center by Mitchell and Ritchey Architects. 2.8 shows the entire arts center scheme while 2.9 shows the revised scheme to build only the Civic Arena. Funding was never raised to complete the project in the original plan. From the online Collection of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Collection number MSP285.B006.F20.I04).



Figures 2.10-11: Demolition of the Lower Hill (ca. 1956). Note St. Peter's Church partially demolished in 2.11. Parishioners fought to save the church from demolition but were unsuccessful. From the online Collection of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Collection number MSP285.B006.F20.I04).

After the release of the report by the CPC in 1953, the URA was charged with the complex task of acquiring the land and buildings for the project. The passage of the Housing Act of 1954 had a large impact on the Lower Hill project. On one hand, it removed the requirement that federal urban renewal funds be available only for projects with a “residential emphasis,” making the planned cultural center a perfect candidate for federal funding. On the other hand, the 1954 Act required that cities submit a more stringent “workable program” in order to be eligible for funds. This workable program included the development of a relocation plan for the displaced residents.<sup>69</sup> The relocation plan developed by the URA was based on a family-by-family census survey of the project area, which counted over 1800 families to be displaced. The discrepancy between the estimate and actual number of displaced families can be explained by the “several hundred” families who moved prior to being formally displaced. The relocation plan estimated that just over half of the white families (367) and two-thirds of the African-American families (975) would be eligible for public housing, so further relocation help would not be needed as they would take advantage of this subsidized housing. Of the remaining families, the URA estimated that thirty-two African-American and eighty-eight white families were homeowners with enough equity to purchase new homes. The remaining families were those who did not qualify for public housing yet did not have enough equity to purchase market-rate housing. The

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<sup>69</sup> Donald L Stevens, Jr., “The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh” (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 71; Crowley 83; Pittsburgh Planning Commission, “Redevelopment Area Plan for Redevelopment Area No. 3” (Pittsburgh, PA: June 7, 1955) 16.

URA anticipated that only this smaller group of 338 families and individuals would need additional housing (Figures 2.12-13).<sup>70</sup>

While many families relocated on their own to the Upper Hill neighborhood, data shows that an estimated twenty families from the Lower Hill moved into the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Whether there were more than this that were not formally recorded, newspapers highlighted an influx of African-American residents to Homewood-Brushton and this relocation and its perceived negative impact became a central issue of the 1959 mayoral election.<sup>71</sup>

During the 1950's, urban redevelopment in Pittsburgh had taken on a frenzied character. Redevelopment focused on neighborhoods with the worst conditions on the surface, however, projects catered to businesses rather than redevelopment in the interest of neighborhood renewal. For instance, an area of residential and industrial buildings on Pittsburgh's Southside was cleared for a plant to be developed by Jones & Laughlin, a steel manufacturer. New projects did not include additional low-rent housing and this became a common criticism leveled at the developers.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stevens 71; Crowley 83; Pittsburgh Planning Commission, "Redevelopment Area Plan for Redevelopment Area No. 3" 18; "Speed Removal of Hill Families," *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, February 7, 1958.

<sup>71</sup> "Hill Families Pose Relocation Problem," *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 7, 1958.

<sup>72</sup> Crowley 87; Stevens 67-69.



Figures 2.12-13: 2.12 is a collection of photographs documenting vacant buildings in the Lower Hill by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. 2.13 is a collage of the construction of the retractable dome on the Civic Arena. From the online Collection of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Collection number MSP285.B006.F20.I04).



## THE FORMATION OF ACTION-HOUSING, INC.

The passage of the Housing Act of 1954 was the result of a report authored by President Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs in December 1953. The 1954 Act popularized the term "urban renewal," replacing "urban redevelopment" to refer to federally financed projects with the intention of revitalizing slums. Urban renewal

. . . was described as a broader more comprehensive approach to the problems of slums and blight . . . this was intended to permit blight in an area to be eliminated by private enterprise through rehabilitation, so that structures would be conserved before reaching a stage where demolition would be necessary."<sup>73</sup>

Rehabilitation of structurally sound buildings was far cheaper than the acquisition of land and buildings and complete demolition of an area. Additionally, the Housing Act of 1954 authorized urban renewal capital grant funds to be used for "demonstration grants" which would pay up to two-thirds of the cost for projects that pioneered a new technique or creative solution to the "elimination of slums and blight."<sup>74</sup>

Controversy over the displacement of families from the Lower Hill and other redevelopment areas, as well as a national increase in criticism of the urban renewal program gave rise to alternative methods of redevelopment. However, in the late 1950's the CPC was still planning on undertaking new projects in

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<sup>73</sup> James Q. Wilson, ed., *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967) 96.

<sup>74</sup> Wilson 96.

East Liberty, close to Homewood-Brushton, as well as multiple projects on the Northside of Pittsburgh.<sup>75</sup>

In 1954 the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods (ACTION) was formed to study national problems related to urban renewal by creating a nonprofit organization with a board of influential business leaders. President Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs provided the inspiration for the nonpartisan group's formation, which also aimed to educate and sell businessmen on the need for private sponsorship of plans that addressed these issues. The sixty members of the national nonprofit group's board of directors represented the fields of industry, education, finance, government, civic and trade organizations, as well as labor and public service organizations. Four Pittsburghers served on the board: Alfred M. Hunt, secretary of ALCOA, Sidney A. Swensrud, president of Gulf Oil Corporation, Richard K. Mellon, president of T. Mellon & Sons, and Ben Fischer, international representative of the U.S. Steel Workers. These four corporate Pittsburgh leaders would later shape the transition in Pittsburgh from civic-centered urban renewal policy to a greater focus on neighborhoods and residential housing.<sup>76</sup>

The stated mission of the group was "the elimination of slums, the effective rehabilitation of existing housing, and the conservation and sound

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<sup>75</sup> City Planning Commission, *1959 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA) 1-2. David Palmer, "Face-lift Urged for Upper Hill," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, September 29, 1957; William Allan, "Crash' Plan Slated to Save Northside," *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 16, 1958.

<sup>76</sup> Stevens 69.

development of neighborhoods and communities.” The group sought “to replace apathy and neglect with action, to stimulate better citizenship by helping American’s help themselves to better living through greater pride in their homes and neighborhoods.”<sup>77</sup> The American Public Health Association published an editorial in 1956 praising the organization and encouraging local public health and housing agencies to work with ACTION.<sup>78</sup>

ACTION strove to explore problems relating to urban renewal as well as collect data and conduct research to empower local planning agencies, urban redevelopment authorities, and other related organizations. The privately funded organization created a research division that employed leading experts and scholars in planning. ACTION also spent millions of dollars on publicity relating to urban renewal and comprehensive planning.<sup>79</sup>

The group distributed a film, prepared by *Life Magazine*, entitled “Our Living Future” which was intended as a rallying point for interested citizens to expand their own local improvement programs.<sup>80</sup> The eight-month, ninety-city tour included a screening in Pittsburgh on May 22, 1957 at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall in Oakland. The Pittsburgh Area Sponsoring Committee for

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<sup>77</sup> ACTION, Inc., “Citizen Organization for Community Improvement,” September, 1957, inside cover.

<sup>78</sup> “American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods,” *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 46, pp. 1445 (Editorials 1956).

<sup>79</sup> Stevens 69.

<sup>80</sup> Mel Seidenburg, “Our Living Future’ Due,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 4, 1957; *American Journal of Public Health*, vol 46 1445. Editorials 1956.

ACTION was made up of forty-five local organizations that came together in support of the screening (Figure 2.14).<sup>81</sup>



Figure 2.14: Poster advertising screening of “Our Living Future” in Pittsburgh. From the Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

While ACTION used this film as a rallying point for local citizens, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD) was already exploring what local resources might be spent on addressing the housing shortage in Pittsburgh. In 1956 the Executive Committee of the ACCD requested a

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<sup>81</sup> Roland Sawyer, Secretary, Pittsburgh Area Sponsoring Committee for ACTION to Board of Directors, Pittsburgh Housing Association, May 8, 1957. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

housing study be completed by the Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc., Western Division. The housing study was an evaluation of whether a need existed in Pittsburgh for an agency to directly address housing needs in Allegheny County. If it was determined by the study that an organization should be developed, the report would recommend the formation of an agency to address the issues raised in the housing study.<sup>82</sup>

The Economy League noted that Pittsburgh had received national recognition for the renewal projects that it had undertaken in the last decade. However, these projects had been for predominantly industrial, commercial, and civic use, and generally had not included the construction of new housing. The need for new housing had become especially necessary as demolition for the Lower Hill redevelopment project was undertaken in 1956. The large-scale clearance that was deemed necessary for the renewal of the city's blighted neighborhoods caused a relocation-housing problem. It was clear that there was a need for more housing to be provided in Allegheny County, especially if the city were to continue with its policy of neighborhood clearance. The Economy League quickly pointed out that the problem of blight could not be addressed by slum clearance alone.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc. – Western Division. “Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods – Housing: An ACTION Program for Meeting The Housing Problems of Allegheny County.” February 1957, Pittsburgh, PA, cover letter.

<sup>83</sup> Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc. – Western Division. “Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods – Housing: An ACTION Program for Meeting The Housing Problems of Allegheny County.” February 1957, Pittsburgh, PA, inside cover.

The study called for a comprehensive and coordinated program involving the conservation of existing good housing, the rehabilitation of salvageable housing and the demolition of unsalvageable housing, in addition to the building of new housing. Because no organization or agency existed in Allegheny County at that time which could achieve this mission, the Economy League suggested the formation of a new organization to be sponsored by the ACCD. The organization would coordinate the activities of all community agencies, governmental and nongovernmental, in an effort to plan and effect the comprehensive renewal and housing program necessary to the elimination of existing slums and blighted areas within the next twenty years.<sup>84</sup>

The new organization would undertake housing research and planning; finance; construction; repair and remodeling; code enforcement; citizen participation; and public relations for the over-all renewal effort. The Economy League suggested that the name of the organization be the Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods – Housing, Incorporated, to be more commonly referred to as ACTION-Housing, Inc. Based on the national ACTION model, this new organization would also receive support from the national nonprofit. The ACCD would appoint the board of directors; there would be a separate staff for the organization. The annual operating budget was estimated at \$100,000.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc. – Western Division. “Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods – Housing: An ACTION Program for Meeting The Housing Problems of Allegheny County.” February, 1957, Pittsburgh, PA, inside cover.

<sup>85</sup> Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc. – Western Division. “Allegheny Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods – Housing: An ACTION Program for Meeting The Housing Problems of Allegheny County.” February 1957, Pittsburgh, PA, inside cover.

Following the housing study it was determined that instead of setting up a brand new organization, the Pittsburgh Housing Association (PHA) would change its name to ACTION-Housing, Inc. and thus provide the initial structure for the new organization. The members of the PHA would serve on the board of ACTION-Housing with additional select civic leaders. The acting executive director of ACTION-Housing was Roland Sawyer, the former executive director of the PHA.<sup>86</sup>

By June of 1957 the group was beginning to set up its organizational structure and had secured offices at the Civic Building on Ross Street in downtown Pittsburgh. The three main objectives of the new organization were formally outlined as

1. Increasing the supply of good housing for families of moderate income.
2. Bringing about the modernization of older housing and revitalizing aging neighborhoods.
3. Establishing a research base for future housing and urban renewal programs.<sup>87</sup>

These objectives were largely based on the recommendations of the Pennsylvania Economy League Housing Study.

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<sup>86</sup> Stevens 77-78.

<sup>87</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "Semi-Annual Report to the Board of Directors," September 1963, 1.

On Monday February 2, 1959, the first annual meeting of ACTION-Housing was held. The luncheon featured the president of ACTION, James W. Rouse, a mortgage banker and shopping center developer as well as a former member of President Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs and chairman of its Subcommittee on Urban Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, and Conservation. Rouse was later involved with the renovation of Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market in Boston and many other large-scale redevelopment projects around the United States with a historic preservation component.<sup>88</sup>

By 1959 Bernard Loshbough had been appointed to the position of executive director. The board of directors still reflected many of the city's elite, including now-Governor David Lawrence, Richard King Mellon, and H.J. Heinz.<sup>89</sup> The organization solicited members from a diverse group of agencies including the Health and Welfare Planning Association, the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Central Labor Union, and the Council of Churches of the Pittsburgh Area.<sup>90</sup> The published mission of the organization in 1959 stated a virtually identical mission to that recommended in the Pittsburgh Housing Study:

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<sup>88</sup> Joshua Olsen, *Better Places, Better Lives: A Biography of James Rouse* (Washington, D.C: Urban Land Institute, 2003) 65-66, 240.

<sup>89</sup> Charles B. Nutting, President, ACTION-Housing, Inc., to Dr. J.P. Watson, School of Business Administration, University of Pittsburgh. January 9, 1959.

<sup>90</sup> Eleanor B. Church, Chairman, Nominating Committee, ACTION-Housing, Inc., to Dr. J. P. Watson, School of Business Administration, University of Pittsburgh, January 26, 1959.



The objectives of ACTION-Housing, Inc. are to assist in bringing about the coordination of activities of all existing community agencies, governmental and nongovernmental, in an effort to plan and effect the comprehensive renewal and housing program necessary for the elimination of existing slums and blighted areas in Allegheny County within the next twenty years.<sup>91</sup>

ACTION, Inc., the national organization, supported ACTION-Housing in June 1959 by providing a report on the Pittsburgh housing market. ACTION's resources were substantial and with the help of staff in Boston it launched an investigative report. Released on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, "ACTION TO ACHIEVE THE POTENTIAL FOR HOUSING IN THE PITTSBURGH AREA" was prepared by Martin Meyerson, ACTION's Vice President for Research and the Director of the Joint Center for Urban Studies of M.I.T. and Harvard University.<sup>92</sup>

The report was based on interviews with leading businessmen, civic leaders, public officials, architects, home builders, appraisers, lenders, realtors, building materials manufacturers and labor representatives regarding with which housing issues they were most concerned. Specific obstacles that arose were the limitations in the building code for new construction economies and experimentation as well as imbalances in housing provision, especially the failure of the market to adequately house "Negro" families. According to the

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<sup>91</sup> Eleanor B. Church, Chairman, Nominating Committee, ACTION-Housing, Inc., to Dr. J. P. Watson, School of Business Administration, University of Pittsburgh, January 26, 1959.

<sup>92</sup> ACTION, Inc. "ACTION TO ACHIEVE THE POTENTIAL FOR HOUSING IN THE PITTSBURGH AREA" June 23, 1959, Cover Letter.

report, local leadership was aware of existing local housing problems but was unsure of how to address them.<sup>93</sup>

## EARLY ACTION-HOUSING GOALS AND PROJECTS

What is striking about ACTION's report is the prominence of rehabilitation as one of the three main potentials to address housing in Pittsburgh. "Potential 2: Concentration on Rehabilitation Success" states that:

. . .in any one year – even at a top year for housing starts – new housing adds up to no more than three per cent of the total housing stockpile. Almost all housing is "old" housing. The investment in older houses and older neighborhoods is far too great to dissipate it through accrued obsolescence. Housing must be constantly refreshed and refurbished, and civic reinvestment and maintenance must bulwark stepped-up private reinvestment and maintenance. Otherwise, the housing market cannot be made to function properly, rewarding both the entrepreneur and the consumer, and safeguarding the property investor. *Rehabilitation must be made to work*; if it does not work, the housing problems and civic problems of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County will not be solved.<sup>94</sup>

The report notes that ACTION-Housing had already been considering a large-scale rehabilitation strategy using a previously established Pittsburgh Development Fund to "make intermediate loans to acquire and rehabilitate properties for which loan applications would otherwise be rejected by financial

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<sup>93</sup> ACTION, Inc. "ACTION TO ACHIEVE THE POTENTIAL FOR HOUSING IN THE PITTSBURGH AREA" June 23, 1959, Cover Letter.

<sup>94</sup> ACTION, Inc. "ACTION TO ACHIEVE THE POTENTIAL FOR HOUSING IN THE PITTSBURGH AREA" June 23, 1959, 5. Emphasis mine.

institutions.”<sup>95</sup> ACTION-Housing had demonstrated in its 1959 proposal for a Pittsburgh Development Fund that the balance sheet for housing in Allegheny County in 1958 carried a deficiency of 11,200 units. The demand for housing was based on the estimate that 4,000 new families would need housing, 1,700 units would need to be created based on the number demolished in 1958, and 12,500 would need to be replaced due to normal depreciation. What the Pittsburgh Development Fund proposal suggested was that private investment would provide a solution to the bottleneck, the lack of immediate equity capital for creating new housing and restoring “run down houses and neighborhoods.” (Figure 2.15)<sup>96</sup>

While the initial development of the fund appears to suggest that rehabilitation was a key component to solving the housing crisis in Allegheny County, ACTION-Housing’s top priority was to be new construction into the 1960’s. The two other “potentials” outlined in the national ACTION report were the “Demonstration of New Housing Technology” and “An Overall Program for Housing.” Growing criticism of urban renewal based primarily on the displacement of low-to-moderate income families gave these “men of ACTION” the opportunity to think creatively about the housing crisis. Although the technique of slum clearance was still considered an economic generator, there was growing concern that there was not enough new housing being created.

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<sup>95</sup> ACTION, Inc. “ACTION TO ACHIEVE THE POTENTIAL FOR HOUSING IN THE PITTSBURGH AREA” June 23, 1959, 5.

<sup>96</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. “Pittsburgh Development Fund, A Proposal” Pittsburgh, PA July, 1959.

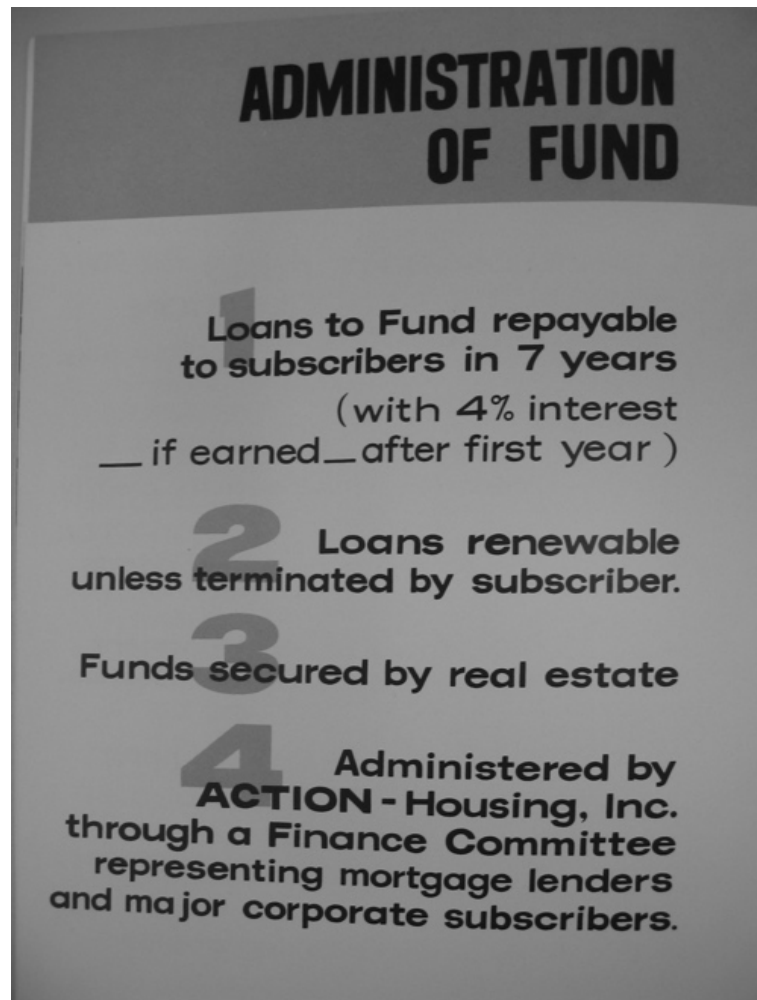


Figure 2.15: Sample from "Pittsburgh Development Fund – A Proposal," explaining the overall steps for participation. From ACTION-Housing, Inc. "Pittsburgh Development Fund, A Proposal" Pittsburgh, PA July, 1959.

In order to generate new housing and pioneer new building techniques, ACTION-Housing's leaders proposed that the newly formed Pittsburgh Development Fund be utilized for a cooperative housing project, East Hills, located between Homewood-Brushton and Wilkinsburg. 1,680 dwellings were constructed on several acres of undeveloped land. The houses were built in four groups in order to avoid the usual residential sprawl and offer protection against blight. Instead of razing the hilly land, the housing groups were built

into the landscape, which broke up the monotony typically associated with public housing projects. The project also included a community center and was meant to provide amenities to the residents.<sup>97</sup>

## CONCLUSION

By the late 1950's the architects of Pittsburgh redevelopment could no longer ignore the growing concern that the continued clearance of neighborhoods would displace too many residents. The solution proposed by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development was to support a new organization, ACTION-Housing, Inc., that would focus on creating housing for low-to-moderate income families by the construction of new housing and the rehabilitation of old but structurally sound homes. This was representative of a greater trend towards rehabilitation occurring nationally with the passage of the 1954 Housing Act. As a first step, ACTION-Housing's leadership sought to creatively address the housing problem through the construction of East Hills. This was the first use of the Pittsburgh Development Fund, which would later finance the first rehabilitation efforts aimed at low-to-moderate income residents.

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<sup>97</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "East Hills: A Demonstration of Better Living," July, 1959, 4-6; Thea Ann Young, "An Examination of the Potential Contributions of Housing Cooperatives to Neighborhood Stabilization Strategies: A Case Study," (MRP Thesis. Cornell University, 1985).

## CHAPTER THREE: NEIGHBORHOOD URBAN EXTENSION

### INTRODUCTION

Scholars and activists in the early 1960's, such as Jane Jacobs, who were concerned with the destruction caused by urban renewal and the preservation of neighborhoods, saw citizen participation as paramount to addressing these problems. Concurrently, federal policy under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations began to highlight the need for citizen participation in urban renewal as well as increased attention to conservation and rehabilitation in renewal areas.<sup>98</sup>

The early 1960's were also a pivotal movement in Pittsburgh's planning history as the practice of large-scale clearance gave way to more sensitive approaches to planning and neighborhood development. In 1960 the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood of Pittsburgh became a microcosm for this new transition into participatory planning (Figure 3.1). ACTION-Housing's development of a participatory planning program influenced the Community Renewal Program set-up under the Pittsburgh Planning Department. The Community Renewal Program focused on social as well as physical renewal of neighborhoods and represented an important transition of city government away from large-scale clearance.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> No Author, *Memorandum for File*, February 22, 1962. Records of the Buhl Foundation, 1869-1980, MSS #187, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Box 66, Folder 5.

<sup>99</sup> City Planning Department, *Annual Reports: 1960-63* (Pittsburgh, PA).

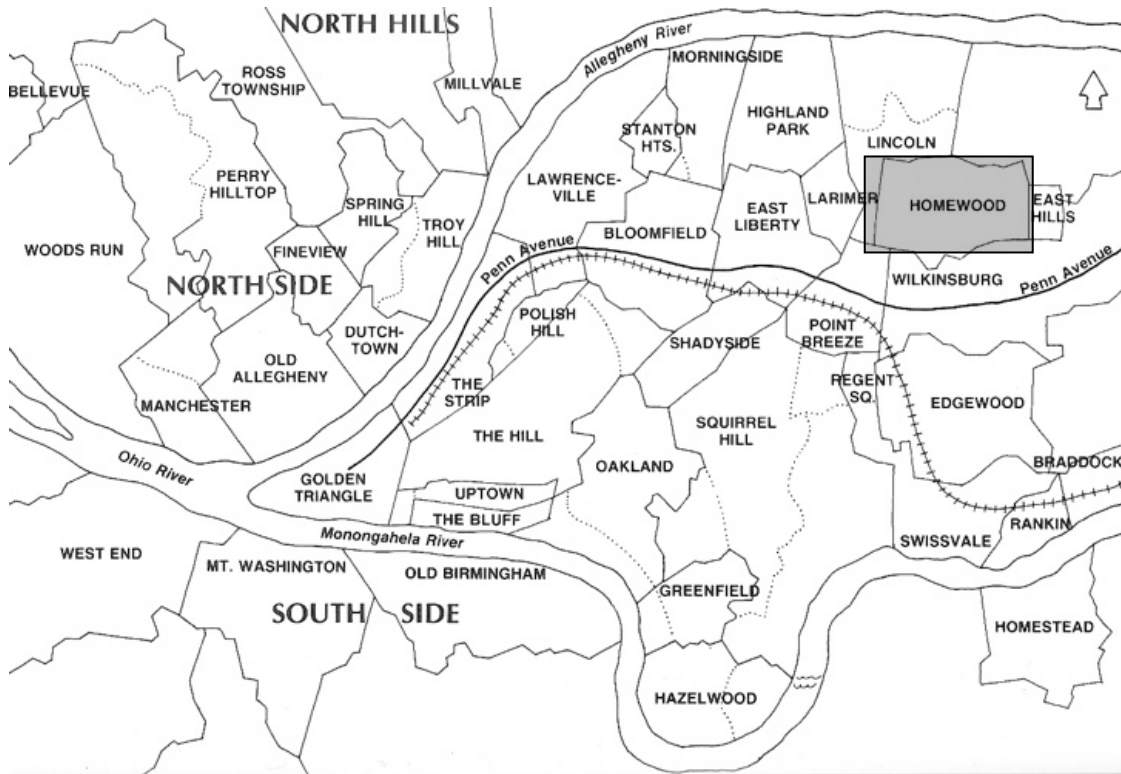


Figure 3.1: Neighborhood map with Homewood-Brushton highlighted. From Franklin Toker, *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) vi.

Various models of citizen participation were becoming increasingly common in urban renewal projects in cities across America. One such project was the Hyde Park-Kenwood demonstration renewal project in Chicago, which was similar to what would be undertaken in Homewood-Brushton. In Hyde Park-Kenwood, the urban renewal project was largely planned prior to the formation of the citizen participation group, the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference. The role of the Conference was mainly one of communication with the neighborhood residents, to promote the demonstration plan, and assist residents in remaining in the neighborhood as the redevelopment

process took place. James Cunningham, who served as the director of the Community Conference for several years during this process, was eventually hired away from Chicago by Bernard Loshbough to serve as Assistant Director of ACTION-Housing in 1959. Cunningham's involvement with the Hyde Park-Kenwood project and subsequent criticism of his role at the Conference in the 1961 book *The Politics of Urban Renewal* by Peter Rossi and Robert Dentler led directly to his goal of creating a highly participatory process for citizen involvement in urban renewal. Bernard Loshbough had served in India while working for the Ford Foundation and had become particularly interested in the adaptation of U.S. agricultural extension to the villages and cities in India. Loshbough posited that these techniques could be successfully adapted to an urban environment and empower citizens to exercise control of their neighborhoods. Loshbough and Cunningham conceived of a very different kind of citizen participation: one that was developed by and for neighborhood citizens.<sup>100</sup>

#### SELF-HELP URBAN RENEWAL IN HOMEWOOD-BRUSHTON

September 1, 1960 marked the first official day of Neighborhood Urban Extension, as developed by ACTION-Housing. Neighborhood Urban Extension began in the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood of Pittsburgh first as a "Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program" (Figure 3.2). While in 1960 the Urban Redevelopment Authority was still utilizing slum clearance to address

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<sup>100</sup> Peter H. Rossi and Robert A. Dentler, *The Politics of Urban Renewal: The Chicago Findings* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961) 136-7, 233; Donald L. Stevens, Jr., "The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh" (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 137; Interview with James Cunningham, Interview Bernard Loshbough.



blighted areas in East Liberty and West Manchester, ACTION-Housing supported an alternative program, one emphasizing the preservation of declining but sound neighborhoods. The ACTION-Housing program depended on the efforts of neighborhood people to utilize city resources, hence the name “Self-Help Urban Renewal.”<sup>101</sup>



Figure 3.2: Neighborhood layout of Homewood-Brushton. Black designates commercial areas, dark grey designates industrial and light grey designates residential. From City Planning Commission, “A General Plan for Development,” (Pittsburgh, PA: 1963) 12. Records of the Health and Welfare Planning Association, Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, PA, MSS #158, Box 158, Folder 10.

<sup>101</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. “First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh; “Urban Renewal From Grass Roots,” *Buffalo Courier Express*, July 16, 1963; “A Relocation Agency,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 6, 1966; Sam Spatter “\$7 Million East Liberty Plans Await Redevelopment Go Sign,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 20, 1966.

The first year of Self-Help Urban Renewal was financed with part of a \$45,000 from the Buhl Foundation, which was paid in three annual installments of \$15,000. ACTION-Housing submitted annual reports on the progress of the program and the dispersal of funds continued based on “satisfactory progress.” The Board of Managers of the Buhl Foundation believed that it would be “desirable that there be an experiment for measurement of the possibilities to be achieved by a program of self-help renewal” and that the program was an “opportunity for an important contribution to the community.”<sup>102</sup> The money from The Buhl Foundation was to be spent on staff and office supplies for the Urban Extension Office in Homewood-Brushton.

## NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

The Homewood-Brushton neighborhood, on the eastern edge of Pittsburgh, grew rapidly as a residential suburb of the city beginning around 1850. The city annexed the area in 1868. Three distinct periods of development can be linked to new modes of transportation into the area, as well as the settlement of several large businesses there. The Pennsylvania Railroad cut through the center of the neighborhood in 1860 and large residences were built in the pastoral landscape for families that could afford the commute to the center of Pittsburgh. The railroad ran east/west through the area and several notable families built their residences to the south of the rail line, including Andrew Carnegie, George Westinghouse, and Howard Heinz. The electric trolley was

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<sup>102</sup> The Buhl Foundation. “Appropriation Resolution No. 211. Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, PA. April 20, 1960.

extended to Homewood-Brushton in 1892 and made the area accessible to middle and working class families who settled there during the neighborhoods largest period of growth: 1892-1915.<sup>103</sup>

From 1915-1930, light industrial plants such as Westinghouse Electric and Mine Safety Appliances spurred another increase in working class housing. The Pennsylvania Railroad line divided the neighborhood into North and South Homewood, with wealthy, white Protestant English, German, Scotch, and Scotch-Irish families settling in North Homewood. In South Homewood, where the factories had begun to grow, Irish Catholics and Italians lived in the working class housing that served these industrial plants. African-American families moved into South Homewood in the 1930's, settling first in the hilly areas at the outskirts of the neighborhood, and then later moving to the flat valley below. The historian James Van Trump wrote of North and South Homewood in 1969 that

. . .as it was in the past, the great dividing line of the district remains the now much attenuated tracks of the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Here that special American phrase, 'the other side of the tracks,' with all its density of social implication, now more than ever possessed for Homewood-Brushton a certain muted fullness of connotation and reference.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Donald L Stevens, Jr., "The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh" (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 138.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur P. Zeigler, *Cora Street*, "The Valley and the Suburb: A History of the Homewood-Brushton Area by James D. Van Trump. Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., January 1969) 70, 74; Donald L Stevens, Jr., "The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh" (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 138.

Tensions between African-American and Italian working class families existed, however up to the 1950's the neighborhood was a stable integrated community with flourishing commercial districts on Homewood and Brushton Avenues (Figures 3.3-3.6). As was common in cities all across America, racial and ethnic prejudices made it difficult for African-Americans and other racial and ethnic groups to acquire better-paying jobs and enhance their social status. White families increasingly left center cities for the suburbs and African-American families, overwhelmingly renters due to their social status, moved into the vacated housing.



Figure 3.3: Homewood Avenue (ca. 1937). From the online collection of the Pittsburgh City Photographer, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, ID 715.3736364.CP.



Figure 3.4: Homewood Avenue (June 21, 1950). From the online collection of the Pittsburgh City Photographer, Archives Service Center, ID 715.5083438.CP.



Figure 3.5: Cornerstone ceremony at Baptist Temple Church, Frankstown Avenue (ca. 1945). From Carnegie Museum of Art 1996.69.115, Teenie Harris Collection, online.



Figure 3.6: Picnic in Homewood-Brushton, including Ms. Ida Mae Mauney, Billy and Jean Curtis, Savilla Williams and Billy Williams (ca. 1950). From the online collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art 1996.69.107, Teenie Harris Collection.

As with other neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, high-income families began moving out of Homewood-Brushton following World War I. During the Great Depression single-family homes were converted to multi-unit properties and residents had less money to spend on maintaining their homes. As stratification of the classes increased in Homewood-Brushton, so did urban problems such as crime, unemployment, and an increasingly deteriorating

neighborhood. Families were drawn away by the utopian vision of suburban life, 69% moved out of the neighborhood between 1950 and 1960.<sup>105</sup>

Neighborhood decline caused local leaders to call upon the Federation of Social Agencies (later the Health and Welfare Planning Association) to provide support and address neighborhood problems. In 1939 the Federation of Social Agencies helped clergymen, school principals, the director of the YMCA, leaders of veterans organizations, the Chamber of Commerce Secretary, and social agency workers form the Homewood-Brushton Community Council. The organization was made up in total of fifteen affiliated organization and twenty-five individuals. The constitution of the Council stated:

To serve as a medium whereby the organizations and interested individuals of Homewood-Brushton may coordinate their efforts for the betterment of the community on a non-commercial, non-sectarian, interracial and non-partisan basis. The Council will help to stimulate and promote the activities of all existing organizations and shall not initiate or sponsor any program of direct services.<sup>106</sup>

The Council addressed race relations, public safety, zoning, housing, recreation, and health. The Council was able to successfully lobby the city for additional traffic lights and stop signs as well as prevent changes to zoning it believed would be harmful to the neighborhood. In 1958 the Federation of

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<sup>105</sup> Donald L Stevens, Jr., "The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh" (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 140.

<sup>106</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 8.

Social Agencies was reorganized and the name was changed to the Health and Welfare Planning Association. Staff, which had been formerly funded by the Federation of Social Agencies, was withdrawn from the Homewood-Brushton Community Council and the organization died out.

In the early 1950's, residents in Homewood-Brushton began seeing the effect of city and federal money spent on urban renewal projects around the city and felt that if they organized them might be able to receive some of this funding. A group of residents concerned with property deterioration, a rising crime rate, and an increase of taverns formed the Homewood Community Improvement Association (HCIA) in 1954. The HCIA began a successful campaign organizing block club affiliates throughout the neighborhood. The HCIA focused on property improvement, enforcement of housing and zoning codes, and the strengthening of morals and morale in the neighborhood. They promoted the benefits of yard beautification and home repairs through neighborhood contests; they fought for increased police presence and the elimination of surplus liquor licenses.

The widespread grassroots support for the organization gave it the political clout to lobby local governmental agencies for neighborhood assistance. When ACTION-Housing was formed in 1957 and retained an executive director, it is said that the president of the HCIA was one of his first callers.<sup>107</sup> In fact, the first public address by ACTION-Housing's executive director was

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<sup>107</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 9.



made at the Third Annual Dinner of the Homewood Community Improvement Association on October 6, 1957.

According to ACTION-Housing records, at the time of its formation, “public and private agencies concerned with housing and planning were beginning to discuss the possibility of conservation-type neighborhood programs, with a minimum of clearance and a maximum of self-help, as part of the City’s renewal program.” In 1958 the Build American Better Committee of the National Association of Real Estate Boards surveyed several Pittsburgh neighborhoods, including Homewood-Brushton. The public report released by the Committee stated:

Homewood-Brushton is an example of an old city area with serious problems . . . which merits the full-scale of neighborhood conservation, because of the solid and salvable character of the private structures which predominate, the extensive public investment in street, schools, and other public facilities. To propose a mere clean-up, fix-up, paint-up type of program would be unworthy of the neighborhood, the spirit of its property owners and residents, and the potential it has to become a residential area of pleasant livability . . .<sup>108</sup>

ACTION-Housing, looking for a neighborhood partner for its “Self-Help Urban Renewal” neighborhood program, saw the broad-based strength of the HCIA as a good match. ACTION-Housing, with the support of the Health and Welfare Planning Association, the Department of City Planning, the Urban

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<sup>108</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. “First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 10.

Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, the Bureau of Environmental Health of the Allegheny County Health Department, and the Mayor's Urban Renewal Coordinator, developed a "balance sheet" study of assets and liabilities in two neighborhoods: Homewood-Brushton and a Northside neighborhood. The balance sheet was developed for Homewood-Brushton with the help of HCIA leaders, Chamber of Commerce staff, school principals, clergymen, and City agency people assigned to the area. Upon completion of the evaluation, Homewood-Brushton was determined to be the area with the greater potential and was chosen for the pilot program.

Prior to ACTION-Housing's evaluation, a public assistance caseworker in the area, Hannah Pearlman, had convened local leaders in an effort to gain additional support for the neighborhood. She turned to the Health and Welfare Planning Association for advice, which recommended she enlist the support of major industrial leaders in the area. As crime and vandalism were among the issues being addressed, local business executives supported the initiative and the Health and Welfare Planning Association developed a social plan for Homewood-Brushton based on facts and suggestions from local welfare agencies. The existence of this plan was weighed heavily by ACTION-Housing as a neighborhood asset. ACTION-Housing planned to work closely with the Health and Welfare Planning Association in the implementation of their plan for "Self-Help Urban Renewal."

ACTION-Housing began the pilot project by holding a series of luncheons to garner corporate support for the neighborhood project. For example, a luncheon was held December 17, 1959 at the elite Duquesne Club suite of the

Mine Safety Appliance Company, whose plant headquarters were located in Homewood-Brushton. The luncheon was attended by new elected mayor Joseph Barr and his Urban Renewal Coordinator John Mauro. Elmer Tropman and Bernard Loshbough, the executive directors of the Health and Welfare Association and ACTION-Housing respectively, were also in attendance. Mayor Barr stated that the city would support the program “to the full extent of its available resources.” Barr noted that this would include the dedication of the City Planning Department but that the neighborhood would have to finance a planner or wait “a long time for planning assistance.” Corporate executives at the luncheon agreed to financially support a planner dedicated to Homewood-Brushton.

Mayor Barr was the key speaker at a dinner held on February 9, 1960 at the Homewood-Brushton YMCA to introduce the plan to the neighborhood residents. Approximately 125 neighborhood leaders and city officials took part and the heads of major city departments were present. Mayor Barr’s “rousing” speech again committed the support of the city, this time to the local resident leaders who were present at the dinner. C.D. Askew, director of corporation personnel for Mine Safety Appliance Company and active member of the Chamber of Commerce and YMCA was tasked with appointing a steering committee of approximately 30 neighborhood leaders to “develop and carry out a self-help urban renewal program for Homewood-Brushton.”

This steering committee was formed into the Homewood-Brushton Citizens Renewal Council (HBCRC) and received part-time staff assistance from ACTION-Housing. Meetings were held every two weeks for the first several

months and membership was expanded to be more representative of the racial and economic diversity of the neighborhood. Committees were formed to focus on code enforcement, fund raising among residents and a liaison for the physical planner was established. The city's estimate was that the neighborhood would have to raise \$10,000 to pay the planner. The four major companies with plants located in Homewood-Brushton: Mine Safety Appliance Company, Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Edwin L. Weigand Company, and Rockwell Manufacturing Company, all contributed \$2,000 each to the cause. Another \$1,000 was given by the Chamber of Commerce, and \$1,000 was raised by residents. The HCIA utilized their network of block clubs to raise public support and the \$1000 was raised through many small resident donations, averaging \$1.00.<sup>109</sup>

Through the grant from The Buhl Foundation, ACTION-Housing was able to provide full-time support in the form of a Neighborhood Renewal Manager to the HBCRC, as well as outfit an office for him. The Neighborhood Renewal Manager worked as a liaison between the HBCRC, ACTION-Housing, various city and county agencies, and the planner assigned to the neighborhood. A local realtor rented ground-floor space in an old building two blocks north of the main commercial district located on Homewood Avenue.

During the first year the HBCRC set out three goals:

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<sup>109</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 13.

1. Develop a strong, broad-based organization
2. Formulate a sound, long-range plan
3. Achieve short-term success.<sup>110</sup>

It was quickly evident that achieving these three goals would require not only an increase in dedicated staff time but also a strong base of volunteers. Members of the HBCRC were already volunteering time to serve on the Council. The Neighborhood Renewal Manager had hired a local homemaker to provide part-time secretarial help, and eventually this was expanded to a full-time position. There was a need for regular assistance on a weekly basis for additional clerical work, but it was difficult to develop a satisfactory system for using volunteers to help with day-to-day work. In July, the Mayor's Commission on Human Relations assigned a worker to assist the Neighborhood Renewal Manager three days a week. The Health and Welfare Planning Association was able to assign a fieldwork student from the Graduate School of Social Work of the University of Pittsburgh to give assistance to the Social Service Welfare Committee of the HBCRC. At the end of the year the Graduate School of Social Work also assigned a student to do field work under the supervision of the Neighborhood Renewal Manager.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 15.

<sup>111</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 16.

As the Homewood-Brushton Citizen's Renewal Council began its work it identified some fundamental questions to be considered when moving forward:

1. Does City Government have the strength and skills to give effective assistance to a neighborhood?
2. Can the efforts of neighborhood people grow and develop over a long period of time and become a serious factor in halting decline?
3. Can there be successful, sustained working together by leaders who are Negro and white, resident and non-resident, amateur and professional, educated and uneducated, well-off and poverty stricken?<sup>112</sup>

With these questions in mind the HBCRC set out to achieve the three goals. The first goal, to create a strong, broad-based organization, was achieved by the formation of a steering committee made up not just of professional corporate leaders but also of neighborhood residents. The initial forty-member steering committee developed at the founding dinner was winnowed down to a group of twelve committed members and many new residential members were added. However, ACTION-Housing noted that in the first year there was "more plan than progress" for resident involvement on the committee. ACTION-Housing knew that meetings needed to be "lively and well-prepared" in order to retain volunteers' interest. Several members of the original committee group had dropped out because they found meetings boring and inconclusive as ACTION-Housing tried to navigate their new agenda.

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<sup>112</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 14.

The Evaluation Committee of the HBCRC wrote in January, 1961

the underlying hypotheses . . . is that the objectives of the Council can be realized (more likely) if the Council composition reflects the interracial nature of Homewood-Brushton and if the social status of the participants are more congruent. Significantly, all those interviewed by the Evaluation Committee were positive and forthright in welcoming Negro membership in the Council. Their views were not only based on the conventional belief in democracy, but solidly rooted in the pragmatic view that the 'self-help' aspect of the Council activities can succeed only with strong leadership living in the area.<sup>113</sup>

The Evaluation Committee suggested that the Steering Committee be broadened to include more "upper-middle income Negroes, more resident whites, and more white housewives."<sup>114</sup>

The First Annual Report published by ACTION-Housing in 1961 states: "The mobilization and uniting of neighborhood people and City-wide agencies in 1959-60 was an unusual and special attempt to halt Homewood-Brushton's decline." In early 1961, an executive committee was formed to shepherd the work of the HBCRC. A leadership development program was established by

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<sup>113</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 17-18.

<sup>114</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc. "First Annual Report Including Fourth Quarterly Report and Evaluation: Pilot Self-Help Urban Renewal Program in the Homewood-Brushton Neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Covering the period from September 1, 1960 to August 31, 1961. Publicly released: February 1962. Records of ACTION Housing, Inc., ais200111, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh, 17.

ACTION-Housing. To achieve the second goal of formulating a long-range physical plan, the HBCRC divided the neighborhood into five areas where public meetings were conducted to discuss goals for the plan. The initial fundraising efforts by the HBCRC had raised \$10,200, which was used by the Department of City Planning to hire a planner, John Stainton, exclusively to develop a neighborhood plan for Homewood-Brushton (Figure 3.7).<sup>115</sup>

Stainton trained eight “resident communicators” who interacted between the residents and the thirty-member Planning Liaison Committee that was developed through the HBCRC. The resident communicators spread throughout the neighborhood discussing issues of the physical plan with block club members and church organizations, among others. Stainton worked with the Committee to identify five areas of improvement for the preliminary report: traffic and parking, schools and recreation, industry, shopping, and housing. The preliminary plan examined the current land uses in the neighborhood and strategically applied the five areas of study to look at the best configuration of future land use. This included the razing of residential structures in the industrial area to make way for a modern industrial park as well as the modernization and limiting in size of the commercial district. Housing was to be built on the accessible hillside areas that were underutilized for new construction and much of the existing housing stock was to be rehabilitated. Old streetcar barns, which had served as a prominent divide in the neighborhood, would be razed and new school and housing for the elderly was to be built (Figures 3.8-9).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> City Planning Commission, 1960 Annual Report (Pittsburgh, PA) 4.

<sup>116</sup> Donald L. Stevens, Jr., “The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh” (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon



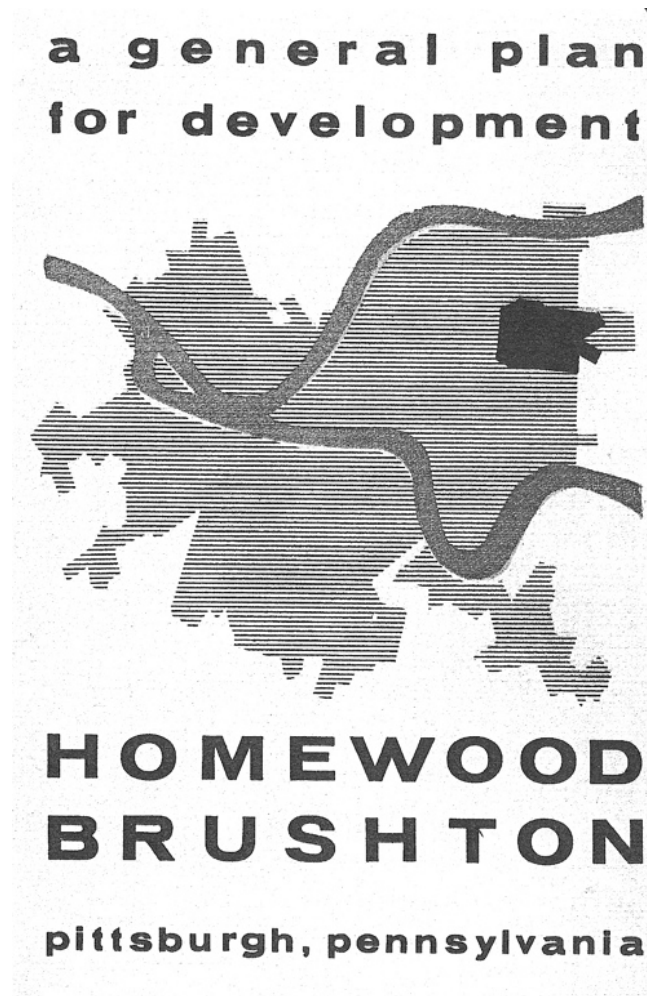
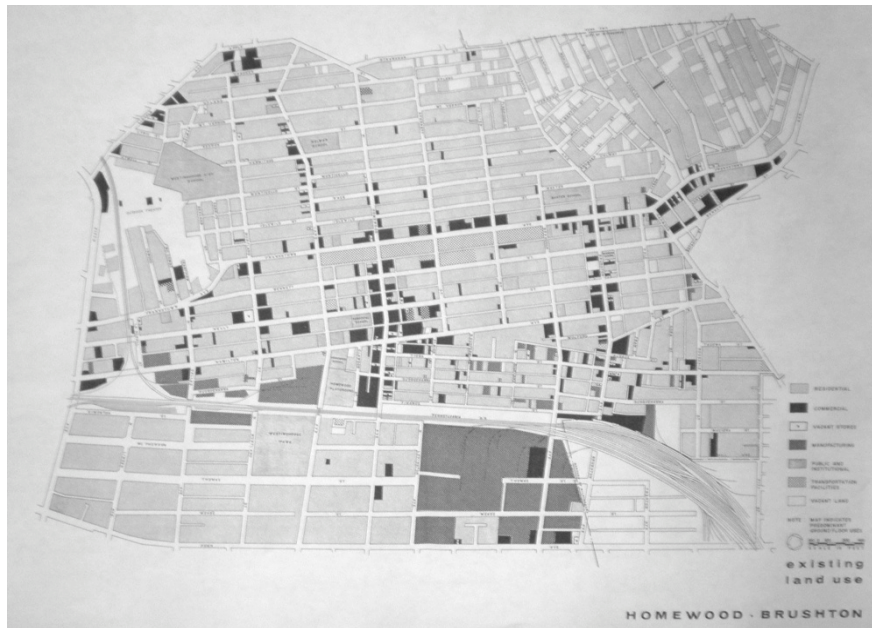


Figure 3.7: Cover of the new Homewood-Brushton physical plan by John Stainton. From City Planning Commission, "A General Plan for Development," (Pittsburgh, PA: 1963) 12-13. Records of the Health and Welfare Planning Association, Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, PA, MSS #158, Box 158, Folder 10.

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University, 1987) 155 and ACTION-Housing, "A Report on the Pilot Program Neighborhood Urban Extension, Homewood-Brushton, 1960-1963," publicly released January, 1964, 15.



Figures 3.8-9: Maps from the Homewood-Brushton physical plan showing the proposed changes in zoning. For example, black designates commercial use. In the existing zoning, commercial uses are concentrated along several main thoroughfares: Homewood, Frankstown and Brushton Avenues. In the new plan (3.9) the commercial district is concentrated in one central area on Homewood Avenue. From City Planning Commission, "A General Plan for Development," (Pittsburgh, PA: 1963) 12-13. Records of the Health and Welfare Planning Association, Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, PA, MSS #158, Box 158, Folder 10.

The City Planning Commission approved the physical plan on December 20, 1963. The Department of City Planning had developed a federally aided Community Renewal Program (CRP) in February 1961. The CRP's aim was to aid in identifying development problems, and in the selection and scheduling of appropriate urban renewal action, which would help eliminate these problems. Its fundamental purpose was to identify and measure, in a broad sense, the extent to which urban renewal action would be required in a neighborhood. It then related this need to resources already available in the neighborhood, which resulted in the formulation of a long-range program for urban renewal action. The CRP program was consciously modeled after Neighborhood Urban Extension. The goal of the CRP still referenced much of the urban renewal jargon associated with past projects and efforts. However, the CRP sought to include citizen participation in new urban renewal projects.<sup>117</sup>

The third goal of the pilot program, to achieve short-term successes, was achieved in the first three years through smaller projects spearheaded by the HBCRC and the Neighborhood Extension Worker. Highlights of these projects included door-to-door housing code enforcement surveys that resulted in 2,000 violations being corrected; appearances before the City Council on matter of public safety, relocation, and zoning; persuading the Liquor Control Board to reject applications for an excessive number of new liquor licensees; registration and counseling of over 400 unemployed residents for retraining and job opportunities; the demolition of twenty-two dilapidated buildings; the

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<sup>117</sup> Pittsburgh Department of City Planning and the Social Planning Advisory Committee, "Community Renewal Program Citizen Participation Report: Relationship to Urban Renewal and Planning," Pittsburgh, PA 1964, 1.

establishment of a branch police station in the neighborhood; pre-school training classes for children; a summer work camp of college students working with residents on home modernization; a scheduled street sweeping system for major thoroughfares; the removal of 879 abandoned cars; the erection of fifteen mobile classroom units at a cost of \$315,000; increased relationships with local universities for tutoring projects; home economics courses; merchant development and other courses; and plans for a neighborhood branch post office.<sup>118</sup>

While the most prominent accomplishment of the three-year project was the long-range plan developed with citizen participation for the area, the small, visible accomplishments of the HBCRC helped to allay citizens who were suspicious of the new plan, especially in light of the past urban renewal projects that included relocation and demolition. As the smaller accomplishments were undertaken, the visible investment in the neighborhood generated citizen support for the physical plan.

#### A CITYWIDE PLAN FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

From 1960-1963, the first three years of the pilot program in Homewood-Brushton, ACTION-Housing continued to evaluate the progress and plan for a larger formal program of Neighborhood Urban Extension (NUE) to be carried out in three neighborhoods over a five-year period. With the culmination of the pilot project in 1963, ACTION-Housing prepared a publication entitled "Plan of Operations for Neighborhood Urban Extension." This publication was to serve

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<sup>118</sup> ACTION-Housing, "A Report on the Pilot Program Neighborhood Urban Extension, Homewood-Brushton, 1960-1963," publicly released January, 1964, 22.

as both a framework for the next five years of NUE in Pittsburgh and also as a guide for other cities that wished to undertake similar projects. ACTION-Housing had looked to other cities to develop what they considered best practices for some of the concepts behind NUE, as well as agricultural extension in India. They had also used Cleveland's revolving loan fund as a model for their Pittsburgh Development Fund. They felt that Neighborhood Urban Extension would be a good model as other cities considered the limitations of urban renewal without citizen input.<sup>119</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although Neighborhood Urban Extension was intended to empower residents the program remained in control of ACTION-Housing. This created tension between the residents, neighborhood leaders, and ACTION-Housing staff. Neighborhood Urban Extension preceded grassroots citizen participation in the 1970's, which gave rise to community development corporations and other citizen-led neighborhood planning and development efforts. In Pittsburgh, it influenced local planning policy by encouraging citizen participation on all renewal projects. Neighborhood Urban Extension solidified Homewood-Brushton's relationship with ACTION-Housing, which would continue for the next two decades.

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<sup>119</sup> "Neighborhood Can Save Cities, Planners Told," *The Louisville Courier Journal*, September 23, 1966.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CORA STREET REHABILITATION

### INTRODUCTION

Early efforts at the rehabilitation of residential structures by ACTION-Housing were first directed at the small-scale of one or two homes. While these projects provided affordable housing for a few low-to-moderate income families, they did not address the larger housing needs that Pittsburgh was experiencing in the 1950's and into the 1960's. These early projects also proved to ACTION-Housing and other investors that rehabilitation on a large-scale was not financially feasible.

The Housing Act of 1954 had "rehabilitation and conservation" as stated objectives in renewal projects, however, the Act lacked a funding package which would make these elements feasible as part of large-scale renewal. In 1961, President Kennedy appointed Robert C. Weaver administrator of the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency (FHHFA) and he was later appointed secretary of the new Department of Housing and Urban and Development (HUD) during the Johnson Administration. Weaver was the first African-American cabinet secretary and wrote many publications, including one titled *Negro Ghetto*, which underscored the negative results of racial discrimination in urban society. Weaver appointed a cadre of housing professionals to the FHHFA, including Philip N. Brownstein, who would later be influential in ACTION-Housing's Cora Street demonstration. These men were career professionals who replaced the real estate-based agenda of

former appointees with those who shared the “desire to reverse the inner city disinvestment policies of the FHA (Federal Housing Administration) and private mortgage institutions.” Weaver and HUD would exert influence over the local Pittsburgh FHA office in order for the Cora Street project to be completed.<sup>120</sup>

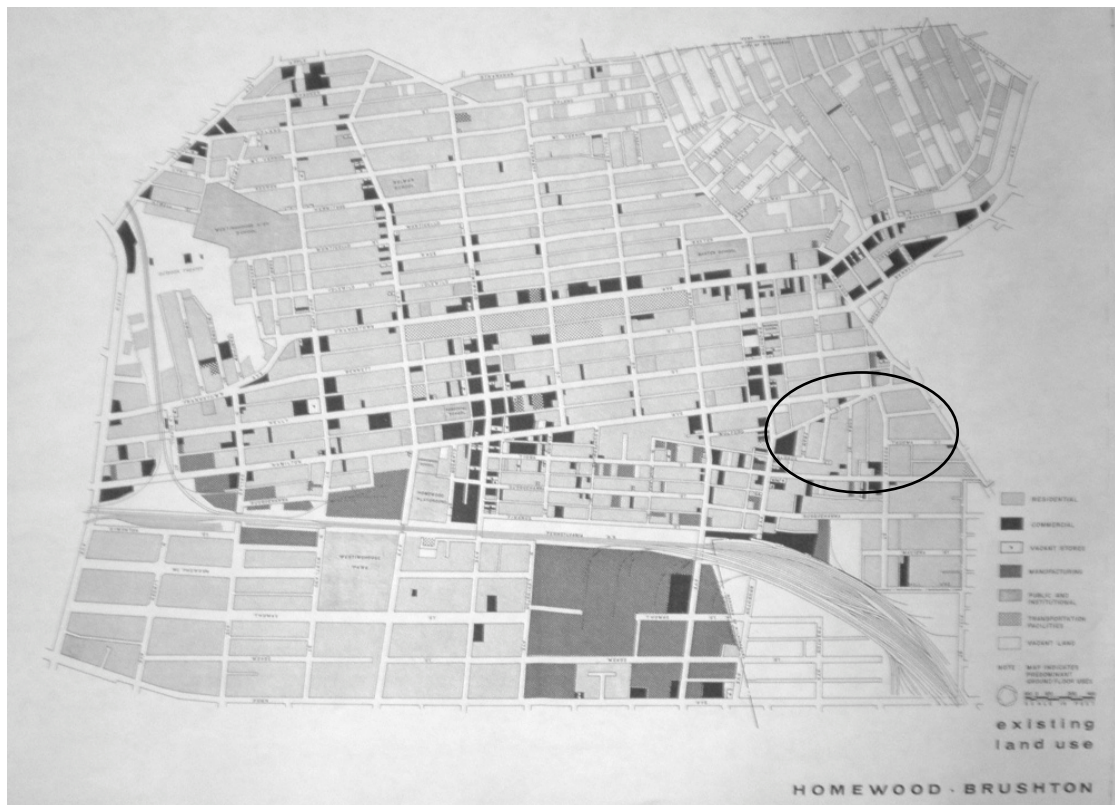
## PLANNING FOR CORA STREET

At the time that ACTION-Housing began to undertake their first large-scale rehabilitation project on Cora Street in Homewood-Brushton, an estimated 90,000 of the 503,000 dwelling units in Allegheny County were considered substandard but fundamentally sound structures that could be rehabilitated. In 1965 Bernard Loshbough and other ACTION-Housing staff began looking for a concentrated area of these salvageable buildings to rehabilitate. Survey work was conducted over a five-month period in Homewood-Brushton, which was selected to pioneer the demonstration project because of the long relationship established with ACTION-Housing through Neighborhood Urban Extension. ACTION-Housing’s criteria for the project was that the housing must need major rehabilitation and not just cosmetic enhancement, that the condition of the housing be varied so that experience and knowledge could be gained from the experiment, that the homes be concentrated on one street or block so that they formed a continuous unit, that there would not be intrusions of dilapidated housing that would dilute the rehabilitation work, and that the work be dramatically visible. Three groups of rowhouses on Cora Street containing

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<sup>120</sup> Donald L Stevens, Jr., “The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh” (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 184-5, 188.

twenty-two housing units were identified as most closely meeting the selection criteria (Figures 4.1-3, Figure 4.4).<sup>121</sup>



Figures 4.1-3: Maps showing the location of Cora Street in Homewood-Brushton and the groupings of the rowhouses on the street. From City Planning Commission, “A General Plan for Development,” (Pittsburgh, PA: 1963) 12-13. Records of the Health and Welfare Planning Association, Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, PA, MSS #158, Box 158, Folder 10; G.M. Hopkins Company Maps, Pittsburgh, 1924, Volume 3, Plat 31B on the University of Pittsburgh Digital Resource Library website. <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/maps/browse.html>

Figures 4.1-3 (Continued).

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<sup>121</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, “Cora Street” (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 13.



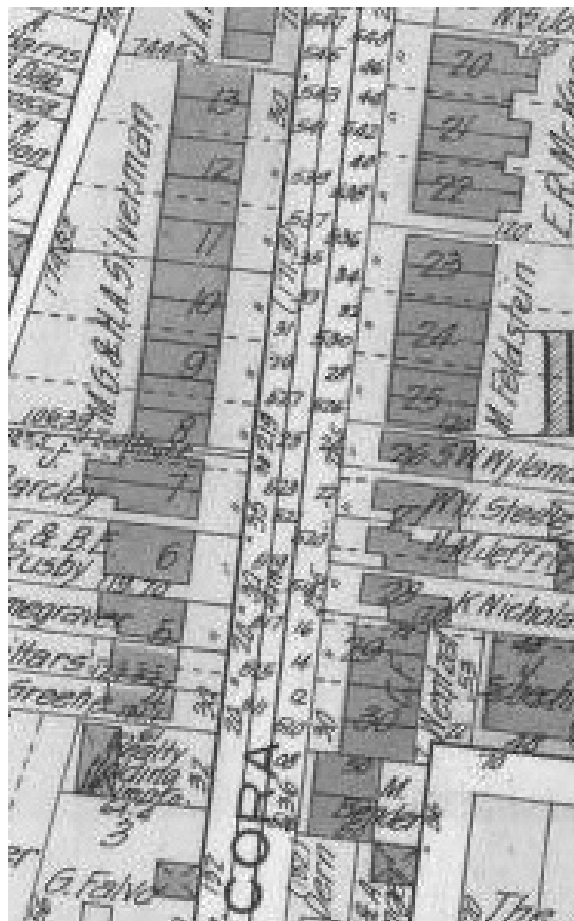
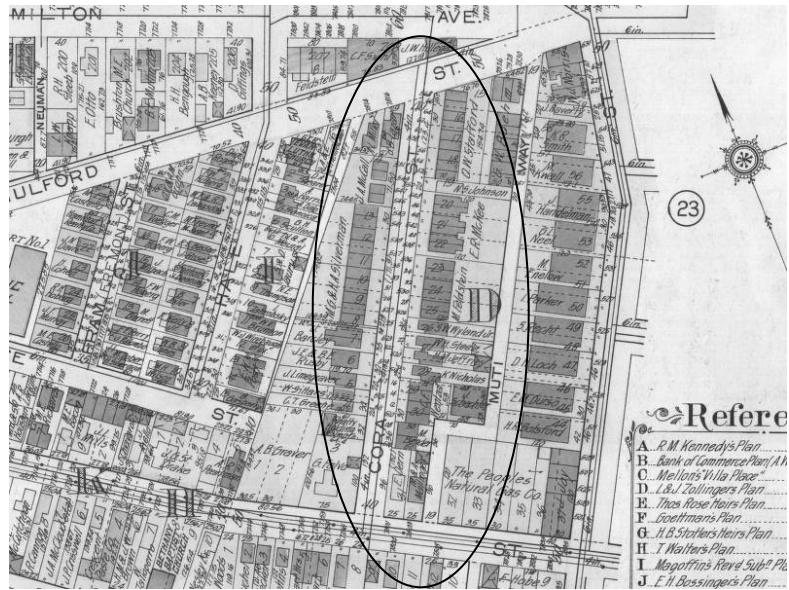




Figure 4.4: Bernard Loshbough (center) and other ACTION-Housing staff and members of the board of directors planning for Cora Street. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 12.

Seymour Baskin, ACTION-Housing's general counsel, confirmed that the Housing Act of 1961 and the subsequent amendments in 1965 could be applied towards rehabilitation work. Most importantly, Section 221 (d)(3) of the 1965 Housing Act insured mortgage loans for multi-family projects and Baskin and Loshbough felt it would be applicable to the Cora Street project and provide the necessary funds to make rehabilitation financially feasible, even profitable. The executive director's first step was to strengthen his relationship with the FHA and ensure that the project would comply with the 221 (d)(3) criteria. Projects that qualified under 221(d)(3) had their mortgages insured by the FHA, which in turn provided rent supplements to the landlord to cover the difference between the unit's rent and 25% of the occupant's

income, not exceeding 70% of the rent value. Final ownership of the project would be limited to a nonprofit sponsor, or anyone willing to limit their profit from the project to 6% of 11% of the mortgage.<sup>122</sup>

ACTION-Housing had support for the project from Robert Weaver, secretary of Housing and Urban Development who was calling for national home rehabilitation saying “there is no need to tear down houses when it’s possible to renovate them without tearing people away from familiar neighborhoods or friends.”<sup>123</sup> Support from the FHA for the project is best exemplified by the application of Section 233 of the Housing Act to the status of the project. Cora Street’s townhouses were more than sixty years old, exceeding the projected life span requirement under FHA procedures. What this meant was that the age of the buildings did not fit into the FHA’s equation for predicting continuing economic life of the potential project. Because of the close relationship between Loshbough and Weaver as well as Carter McFarland and Philip N. Brownstein of the FHA, the Cora Street project was re-evaluated under Section 233 of the Housing Act of 1961, which labeled the project an experimental program and earned the buildings a fifty-year life span for the FHA equation. With regard to the agreement reached between ACTION-Housing and the FHA, Assistant Commissioner for Programs Carter McFarland said “these were fresh decisions; there was no answer in our book sometimes; and when the Pittsburgh office ran across something that

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<sup>122</sup> Irving H. Welfeld, Richard F. Muth, Harrison G. Wehner, Jr., and John C. Weicher, *Perspectives on Housing and Urban Renewal* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975) 19.

<sup>123</sup> Dave Bollinger, “Weaver Urges Drive to Save Older Homes,” *Pittsburgh Press*, October 23, 1966.

appeared to be a violation of their general instruction we had to assist them in decisions requiring waivers from normal procedures.”<sup>124</sup>

Both HUD and the FHA were familiar with ACTION-Housing’s work in Homewood-Brushton through Neighborhood Urban Extension. Although FHA officials had supported rehabilitation efforts in New York City and Philadelphia, funding for low-to-moderate income residential units was primarily aimed at supporting new construction. ACTION-Housing’s Cora Street project sought to keep monthly rents for the refurbished units to within 5% of the original rent. This meant keeping rents to \$95 per month, and not expending more than \$10,455 per unit; or \$230,000 for the entire twenty-two unit project. After acquisition and financing costs, \$87,000 and \$24,000 respectively, the total amount available per unit for “bricks and mortar” rehabilitation was \$5,400.<sup>125</sup>

Fulfilling the mission of keeping the project affordable would mean finding a contractor for the project with rehabilitation experience, and one who could produce the job within the \$5000 estimate range. At least seven contractors and architect/contractors submitted bids to ACTION-Housing over the course of many months. Most bids far exceeded the amount ACTION-Housing could afford. ACTION-Housing also guessed that contractors were building contingencies into their bids because of the location of the project. One contractor did admit to building in a twenty-five percent contingency for the

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<sup>124</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, “Cora Street” (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 15.

<sup>125</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, “Cora Street” (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 14.

project. ACTION-Housing consulted John A. Grove, Jr., an architect they had worked with on one of their new-construction projects, Sheraden Park. Grove estimated the scope of work for each unit to be around \$4,000, with a total cost of \$5,000 factoring in the necessity of paying laborers minimum wage because of the FHA financing. Grove had limited rehabilitation experience but seemed to grasp the necessity of the contractor's qualifications, saying "the average builder doesn't know a thing about this kind of work; he wants new material, he sublets a great deal of the work, he doesn't provide the kind of close supervision required. You can't do rehab that way." Grove also noted that the contractor would probably need "a social conscience" which was hard to come by.<sup>126</sup>

John Grove recommended a contractor whose previous work experience involved mainly fire and insurance jobs, as "his men knew how to tear out, put in, re-use and work with dirty materials." This contractor was hired by ACTION-Housing for the project but was terminated after six months because of inability to finance his portion of the project, delays, and the inability to work within the requirements of FHA inspections. For example, the contractor replaced the basement stairs but because of floor and ceiling height the new stairs did not meet the FHA requirements for stair to riser. Although the requirement, based on new construction, would be impossible to achieve in the current space, the contractor still had to replace the new stairs with stairs that came closer to meeting the FHA requirement. ACTION-Housing assumed

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<sup>126</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 18-19.

the role of general contractor and sub-contracted for the remainder of work on the project after the relationship with the contractor was terminated.<sup>127</sup>

With an architect and contractor secured, ACTION-Housing completed the acquisition of the properties in November 1965 at the purchase price of \$89,000. Money for the purchase was taken from the Pittsburgh Development Fund. In a publication by ACTION-Housing on the Cora Street project initial financing is explained:

In slum housing, costs frequently exceed value. FHA accepted the principal of 'residual' value of structures in lieu of appraised value. In effect, this approach allocated value between costs required to rehabilitate and cost required to acquire, both based upon a maximum cost and mortgage which could be supported by the probably maximum rents which might be obtained after rehabilitation.<sup>128</sup>

## SCOPE OF WORK

As all participants in the project were relatively unfamiliar with rehabilitation work, there were several questions that remained to be answered about the project. For instance, it was difficult to calculate the hours of labor required for repointing old brick walls and replacing only portions of door and window frames (Figures 4.5-6).

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<sup>127</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 19.

<sup>128</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) .



Figure 4.5: Condition of rear yards of Cora Street rowhouses showing debris and exterior wall conditions. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 9.



Figure 4.6: Repointing work commencing on exterior masonry wall of Cora Street rowhouses showing missing window sashes, lintels, and deterioration of brick. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 4.

ACTION-Housing's choice to acquire the three groups of rowhouses in close configuration paid off because while each unit was in a varied stage of degradation, the overall floorplans within each group were virtually identical (Figure 4.7). This allowed John Grove to identify a general specification list for each unit type (A, B, or C) instead of specifying work to be done in each individual unit. Using the general specifications sheet the contractor, Grove, a FHA representative, and ACTION-Housing's Housing Specialist James Cain would inspect each unit and tick off the appropriate boxes for the scope of work for each unit (Figure 4.8). Grove also developed "typical" plans for each group of units, which negated the need for blueprints for each unit.<sup>129</sup>

Based on the means of identifying the scope of work and the three extant groups of housing units, ACTION-Housing and Grove suggested the contractor tackle the work in assembly-line fashion. Thereby a worker would move through each unit performing a specific function, such as replacing a window sash, before, for example, undertaking plaster repair. While this method of conducting work was good in theory, it was soon learned that the reality of materials delivery and the availability of subcontractors made it impossible to follow this automated system.

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<sup>129</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 25.



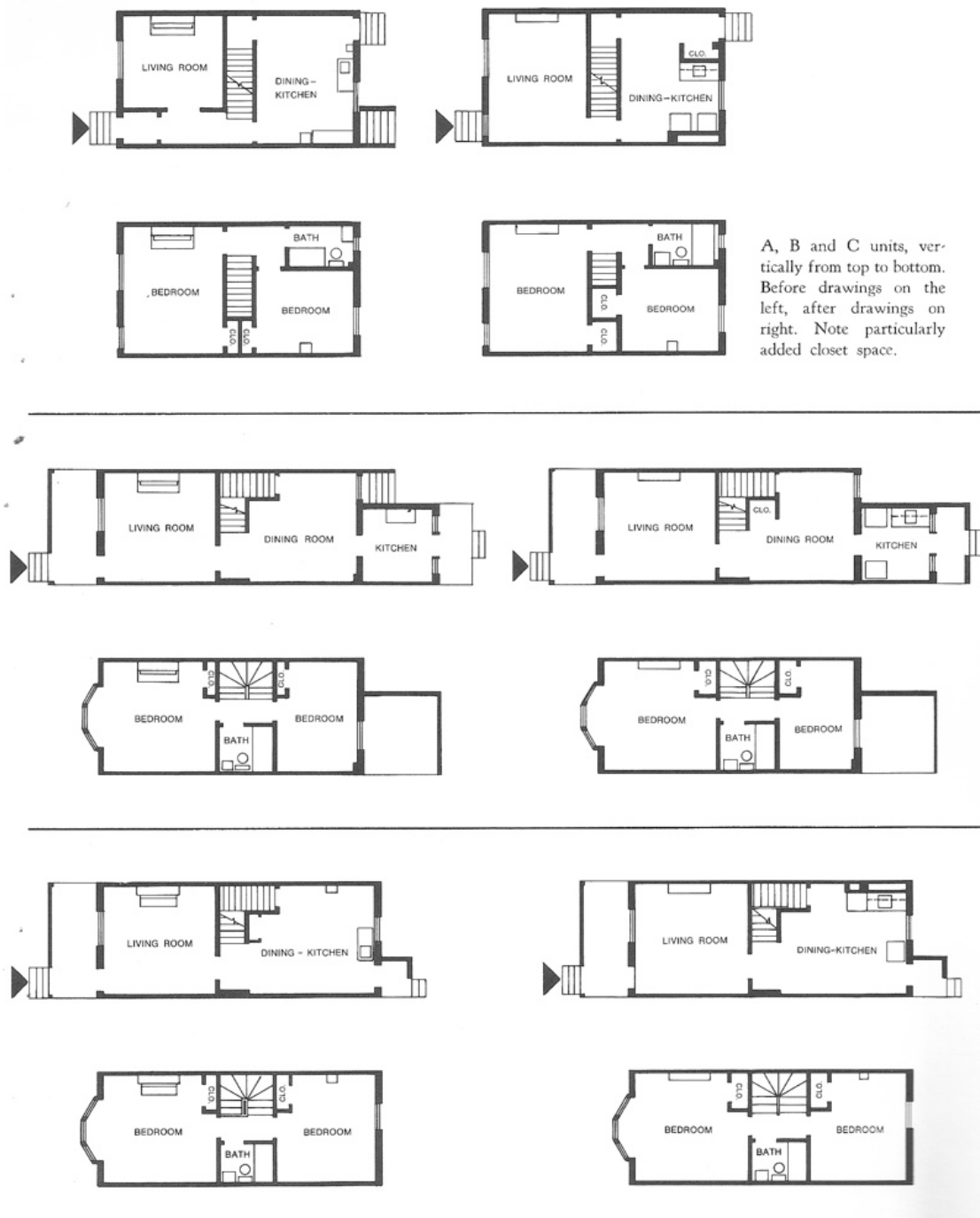


Figure 4.7: A, B, and C units, before and after floorplans. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 23.

SHEET 1 OF 22

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CORA ST. REHABILITATION PROJECT WORK WRITE-UP FOR 5.3.8 CORA ST.

UNIT-TYPE	FLOOR				WALLS				CEILING				WINDOW				SASH TO BE				DOORS				TRANSOMS TO BE MADE				EXTERIOR				ITEMS
	REPAIR	REPLACE	COVER	REPAIR	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	OTHER	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT	REPAIR	REPLACE	PAINT				
BASMENT																																	
BSMT STAIR																																	
FIRST FLOOR																																	
LIVING RM																																	
(DINING RM)																																	
(KITCH.)																																	
STAIR HALL																																	
SECOND FLOOR																																	
HALL																																	
BATH																																	
FRONT BR																																	
REAR BR																																	
MECHANICAL																																	
PLUMBING																																	
SUPPLY																																	
WATER																																	
GAS																																	
WASTE																																	
VENT																																	
FIXTURES																																	
LAUNDRY TRAY																																	
KITCH. SINK																																	
V.C.																																	
TUB																																	
LAV																																	
WATER HEATER																																	
HEATING																																	
DUCTS																																	
REGISTERS																																	

GENERAL NOTES - IDENTIFY ITEM BY CORRESPONDING NUMBERS PLACED IN SCHEDULE

① REPAIR, SPOT PAINT & PAINT

② UNDERLAYMENT - SHEET GOODS OR TILE COVERING

③ PLASTER REPAIRS EXTENSIVE - SHEET ROCK, ALTERNATE

④ TIGHTEN STAIRS - NEW HAND RAIL

⑤ TIGHTEN, REPAIR & SAND FLOOR

⑥ NEW STAIR & HAND RAIL

FHA FINAL SUBMISSION

7-21-66

RECORD SET

JOHN A GROVE JR. ARCHITECT

JULY 19, 1966

Figure 4.8: Specifications sheet for streamlining scope of work. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 24.

This first step in the rehabilitation process was to remove trash and tear out old materials such as wallpaper, linoleum, broken fixtures, and glazing. The next step was the replacement of mechanicals: plumbing, electric wiring, and heating. Only three of the homes did not have heating installed. Instead each unit had a fireplace and in several instances, holes had been cut in the floor on the second story above the kitchen to capture heat from the cook stove. The invasive process of removing old mechanical systems and replacing them was time-consuming, and the electrical contractor noted that gouges had to be made in the brick party walls between the units to place new electrical wiring. Almost 99% of the plumbing was replaced in the units and approximately 80% of the wiring was redone.<sup>130</sup>

Many new features were added and small changes to the floorplans were made. All of the kitchen and bathroom appliances and fixtures were replaced. Cellar entrances at the rear of the units were bricked over because they had poor drainage and presented security risks. With the new mechanical systems, there was no need for the light and air from these entrances. John Grove's design work for the units was primarily a rearrangement of closet space to enlarge some and remove others altogether to give additional living space. For example, a closet removed from the front vestibule enlarged the living room. A new closet added near the rear entrance in the A units created an "ell" shaped kitchen, a "modern looking, well-defined kitchen work area that was more compact than the previous one." Closets on the second story were

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<sup>130</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 29, 30.

also reconfigured, for example, two back-to-back sixteen-inch deep closets were combined to form a more contemporary, thirty-inch deep, closet.<sup>131</sup>

The varying conditions of the twenty-two units assured that not all work would be cosmetic modernization. To keep the cost affordable, the contractor and workmen were encouraged to reuse as much of the material as possible. It was important that the rehabilitation process revive “drooping, weakened in part, fatigued, or partially rotted” materials. The A units had the most serious degradation which included structural failure of exterior brick walls, which were bulging outwards. Parts of the foundation were removed and jacks supported the walls while tie-rods were inserted. This treatment did not restore the walls to their original position, but served to stabilize them. While exterior walls were stabilized, the removal of brick for the tie-rod insertion disturbed larger sections of brick and 20,000 bricks had to be replaced on the A units where the tie-rods were inserted or where the material was considered irreparable (Figure 4.9).

Interior plaster degradation also ended up being more expensive than anticipated. The plan was to patch and paint the plaster after the wallpaper was removed. Unfortunately the plaster was often cracked more severely and had to be replaced (Figure 4.10). Wallboard was used as the replacement material because it could be hung more quickly. Patches had to be used wherever possible but too much time could not be spent on one patch. It was noted in the *Cora Street* publication that the workmen had to be skilled enough

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<sup>131</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, “Cora Street” (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 31.

to: “not remove if he could repair, nor repair if he should remove.” Limiting labor costs to remain on budget meant that the workmen needed to evaluate the area and quickly and skillfully apply a patch that would blend with the entire wall surface after being painted.<sup>132</sup>



Figure 4.9: Example of tie-rod insertion. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 20.

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<sup>132</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, “Cora Street” (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 32-33.



Figure 4.10: Example of deteriorated plasterwork. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 33.

The A units also each contained a sagging first floor due to faulty framing around the stairwell as well as too much vertical load on the floor joists which supported a second floor partition. A new pipe column was fitted in the cellar

once the floors had been jacked up and this was expected to solve the problem in future use. A common problem on all of the three unit types was the disrepair of the windows. Because they had not been maintained, the sashes were rotted, and sills and lintels were missing. The decision to restore the windows had been made as part of the overall mission of reusing as much of the existing building materials as possible. While the materials for restoring the windows were extremely cheap, the labor cost for doing small in-kind replacements of a different nature on almost every window added another increase in expense.

The B and C unit porches were scheduled to be have major repair work completed. However, when the flooring was removed the structural members were in far better condition than had been anticipated. These wooden joists that sat on brick piers had little repair work that had to be completed and so in this case the unexpected hidden condition of a material actually saved the project money.<sup>133</sup>

ACTION-Housing experienced many problems with the project including the relationship with the contractor and existing conditions that added unanticipated expenses. John Grove's site plan called for a large, communal yard behind the three groups of houses and this caused a controversy among residents who wanted a private, controlled space. ACTION-Housing presented the plans to the residents and solicited their input, and it was eventually agreed that the communal yard would allow for a bigger space for

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<sup>133</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 34.

children to play and for outside events. Parking and landscaping was also included in the site planning. New walks and sidewalk trees were planted along with planters at the front of the homes. These landscaping costs could not be completed under the original budget that ACTION-Housing set out. Therefore the organization applied for and received a grant from the Sarah Mellon Scaife Foundation for \$6,000 to complete the landscaping (Figure 4.11).<sup>134</sup>

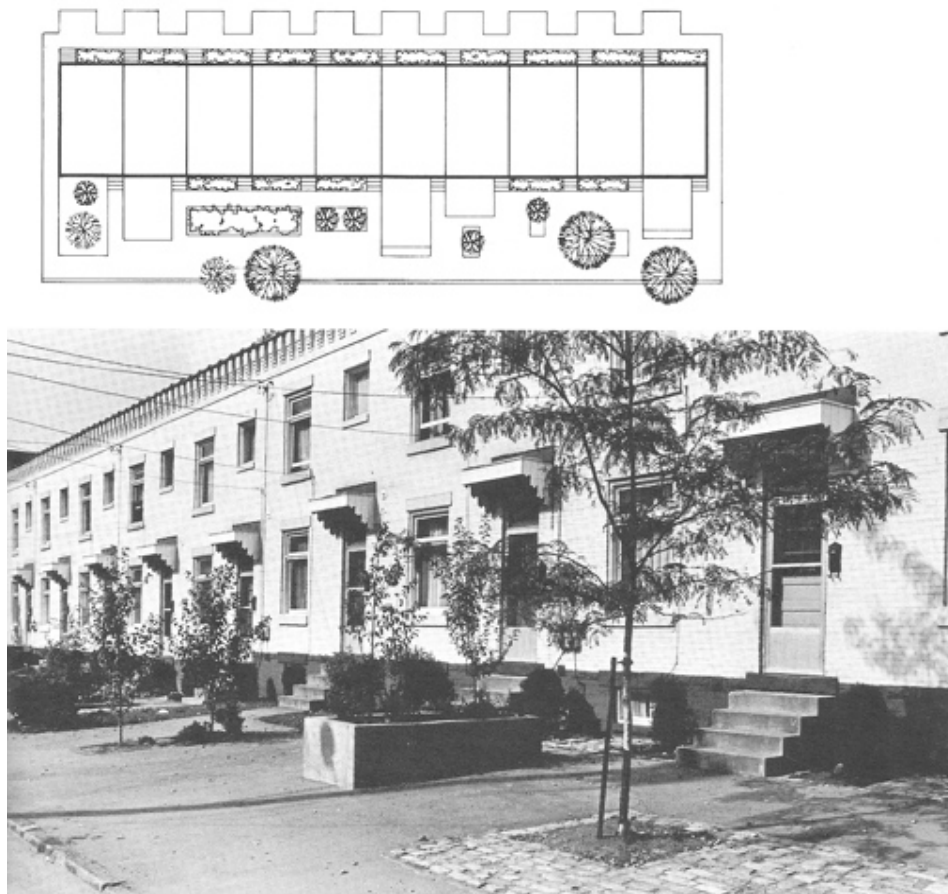


Figure 4.11: Site plan for landscaping and the exterior of the completed rowhouses. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 37.

<sup>134</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 38.



Although many of the bids of the original contractors included contingencies for vandalism and theft of materials, very little of this took place on the project. Tools and materials were locked up at night, and except for some broken windows and pipes, the job site was peaceful. The last hurdle for the project was a timely completion of work. The original schedule of nine months called for the project to be completed in November of 1966. Eventually all the work was completed by August 1967 (Figures 4.12-13, Figures 4.14-15).



Figures 4.12-13: Before and after photos of the townhouses, west side. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 2-3.

Figures 4,12-13 (Continued).





Figures 4.14-15: Before and after interior photos of a living room. From Arthur P. Ziegler, *Cora Street* (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 29.

## THE RESIDENTS

The mission of Cora Street was to use rehabilitation as a way to provide low-to-middle income families with better housing. ACTION-Housing thought the need for housing of the very poor was filled by public housing projects and subsidies. Large-scale rehabilitation would fill the gap between those eligible for public housing and those who could not afford market rate housing. The project budget had been tailored to meet a rent rate of within 5% of the original rent of the unit. ACTION-Housing could only meet this goal through the use of the 221 (d)(3) subsidy. Qualifications were placed by the FHA that residents had to meet in order to live in a refurbished unit:

- No family of less than two or more than four persons permitted in these 22 housing units in this Cora Street project.
- The maximum gross income for a family of two was \$5,950. (At this figure the average take-home pay was \$4,970).
- The maximum gross income for a family of three or four was \$7,000. (At this figure, average take-home pay was \$6,015).<sup>135</sup>

ACTION-Housing did not announce the project until after acquisition of the buildings. This was done because of the fear that publicity about their interest in the area would cause real estate speculation, which would drive up the property values. The Homewood-Brushton Citizens Renewal Council's Housing Committee was informed about the project from its inception, which started rumors in the neighborhood about what the project would entail.

Although Neighborhood Urban Extension remained a positive force in the

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<sup>135</sup> "City Pioneers at Sprucing Up," *The Pittsburgh Press*, August 1, 1966; Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 38.

neighborhood, rumors spread about the project, which caused close to half of the residents to move out of the units prior to the project's ground-breaking. Whether residents were wary of being displaced, a valid concern based on previous city projects, or simply did not want to deal with the agency is not known.<sup>136</sup>

ACTION-Housing hoped that tenants could remain in the vicinity of the neighborhood and then move into the units as they were completed. The choice of almost half the residents to move out of the area during the planning of the project allowed for remaining residents to move to the vacated, adjoining, townhouses while work was completed. As a group of units was complete, families were able to move into the units, having only been temporarily displaced, usually just across the street.<sup>137</sup> Temporary, local displacement for the project was seen as a necessity, and a far better alternative to the permanent displacement caused by urban renewal projects. However, the early confusion about the intentions of the project as well as the temporary displacement of residents led to some criticism of the project by neighborhood residents.

In order to address the confusion and avoid opposition to the project, ACTION-Housing called on the members of the Homewood-Brushton Citizens Renewal

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<sup>136</sup> "22 Homes Bought as Medium Rental" *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 2, 1966; "ACTION-Housing Buys Homewood Block for Low Rent Renewal" *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 8, 1966; Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 43.

<sup>137</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, "Cora Street" (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 43.

Council to conduct outreach education in the neighborhood. Cora Raiford, who had been running a Homemakers Center through Neighborhood Urban Extension, and had lived in the neighborhood for sixteen years, was one such outreach educator. According to Raiford, she was able to reach out to neighborhood residents because she was not part of the “white bureaucracy,” and address skepticism about the project:

The people thought they were being offered an empty promise. Earlier they had not even believed that the center of the Citizens Renewal Council and ACTION-Housing would be in Homewood-Brushton. Nobody felt it was going to be for us; they would wait. I think that the same attitude was found on Cora Street; they thought it was a good promise but it would be too long. Many of them said that they would like to have the new houses, but ‘We can’t wait that long.’ They thought it would take years.<sup>138</sup>

ACTION-Housing built on people like Raiford’s efforts by holding additional outreach events, such as a neighborhood gathering in the backyard of one of the rowhouse groups, however it was not until “the actual sound of hammers and saws” that people’s fears of empty promises were alleviated.

## CONCLUSION

Cora Street represents Pittsburgh’s first attempt at rehabilitating old but structurally sound buildings to house low-to-moderate income families on a large scale. It was also the first project of its kind to use FHA subsidies for this purpose. Although ACTION-Housing encountered challenges with the project, it most importantly represented the recognition of the failures of urban renewal

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<sup>138</sup> Arthur P. Ziegler, “Cora Street” (prepared for and published by ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1969) 44.

and attempted to address them in a new and creative way. Seen as experimental and cutting edge, this project would pave the way for city support for rehabilitated housing as well as the local preservation movement in general. For ACTION-Housing, Cora Street represented a successful project that the organization's leaders felt could be replicated on a massive scale to address the shortage of low-to-middle income housing.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE ALLEGHNEY HOUSING REHABILITATION CORPORATION

## INTRODUCTION

Based on the success of the Cora Street project in Homewood-Brushton, ACTION-Housing's next move was the creation of a large-scale revolving fund for rehabilitation. Running on a track record of garnering foundation grants and city funding for Neighborhood Urban Extension and new housing projects, the organization felt that it could develop a revolving fund of private investments that would produce rehabilitated housing for low-to-moderate income families. Although housing rehabilitation had been the second of ACTION-Housing's three-pronged mission, until Cora Street the organization had been unable to produce a successful project. As mentioned earlier, national ACTION had supplied ACTION-Housing with a report as early as 1959 suggesting that the local organization was poised for success by utilizing their development fund for large-scale housing rehabilitation. However, the citizen empowerment efforts spear-headed by Bernard Loshbough and James Cunningham left little room for these skills to be sharpened until the mid-sixties when the development fund was utilized for Cora Street.

## HOME MODERNIZATION

Early efforts that ACTION-Housing made at rehabilitation before Cora Street appeared to be testing rehabilitation on a small scale. In 1959 they sponsored the rehabilitation of one home in the Beltzhoover neighborhood, which was then opened to the public to demonstrate the feasibility of home modernization (Figure 5.1). The home was put on the market and preference was given to buyers who had been displaced by the Lower Hill Redevelopment project.



The home was eventually sold to a displaced African-American family.<sup>139</sup> In 1960 ACTION-Housing had teamed up with the Amber Lumber Company and *Life Magazine* to launch a home modernization study in Homewood-Brushton. The house, 7657 Baxter Street, was visited by almost 10,000 people who “saw the kinds of home improvements available through a lumber dealer, and how a house could be modernized on a room-by-room basis.” In terms of economic impact, the renovation experiment did not attract new customers to Amber Lumber as anticipated and the project languished.<sup>140</sup>

Prior to Cora Street, ACTION-Housing did attempt to undertake one large-scale rehabilitation effort in Pittsburgh’s Upper Hill. After three years of work the project remained economically unfeasible because long-term mortgage commitment could not be obtained. In the 1940’s Pittsburgh leaders had creatively utilized public and private funds prior to the passage of the 1945 Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law and the 1949 Housing Act to begin the planning of large-scale urban redevelopment projects. ACTION-Housing attempted to creatively use rehabilitation as a solution to the housing problem but was unable to utilize available funding mechanisms in the early 1960’s to close the financial gap. The structure of the federal subsidies and mortgage

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<sup>139</sup> “40 year-old Beltzhoover Home Gets New Lease on Life,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 7, 1959; “Introduce Remodeling of Run-down Homes,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 6, 1959; “Pick 40-year-old House For ‘Cinderella’ Fixup,” *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, August 28, 1958; “Rehabilitated House Is Put Up for Sale,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 29, 1958; “Revamped Beltzhoover Home Sold To N.W. Biggs,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1959.

<sup>140</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh Volume I: Government Business and Environmental Change*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) 154.

programs allowed ACTION-Housing to remain committed to providing low-cost housing while utilizing the available stock of salvageable homes.<sup>141</sup>



Figure 5.1: Before and after images of the rehabilitated Beltzhoover home. From "40 year-old Beltzhoover Home Gets New Lease on Life," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 7, 1959.

## THE PIONEER PROPOSAL

The Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (AHRCO) was ACTION-Housing's attempt provide rehabilitated low-to-moderate income housing on a

<sup>141</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 154.

large-scale through the use of a revolving loan fund. The proposal for AHRCO states, "Pittsburgh once again has the opportunity to lead the nation in providing a creative and effective solution to a troublesome public problem."<sup>142</sup> The ingenuity of the AHRCO proposal lies in its appeal to private enterprise to take the lead on the mass rehabilitation of existing housing for low-to-moderate income families. J. Stanley Purnell, chairman of the board and president of ACTION-Housing states in his forward:

Can it be that we, a nation of builders, have not learned the economics of rebuilding? Or how to develop and adapt space-age construction systems and technologies to housing rehabilitation? . . . Herein may lie that answer to many of our blight problems.<sup>143</sup>

ACTION-Housing staff believed that investors in the fund would receive a reasonable, although limited, profit on their funds, different from a charitable donation or other means of financial giving but with the same socially responsible mission.<sup>144</sup> ACTION-Housing hoped to accumulate between \$3,000,000 and \$4,000,000 for the new corporation, which would be similar to the Pittsburgh Development Fund, in the sense that it would be a revolving loan fund that would deliver the initial capital for rehabilitation projects.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc., *AHRCO Proposal* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1967) Introduction.

<sup>143</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc., *AHRCO Proposal* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1967) Forward.

<sup>144</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc., *AHRCO Proposal* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1967) Introduction. Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr., Leopold Adler, II, and Walter C. Kidney. *Revolving Funds for Historic Preservation: A Manual of Practice* (Pittsburgh: Ober Park Associates, Inc., 1975) 91.

<sup>145</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc., *AHRCO Proposal* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1967) 9.

Once the housing was rehabilitated, it would be sold to a nonprofit management company who could utilize mortgages under the 1961 and 1965 Housing Act to finance the purchase from ACTION-Housing. The organization also contacted several religious groups, particularly in Homewood-Brushton about setting up non-profit management companies to acquire the rehabilitated homes.<sup>146</sup>

ACTION-Housing proposed that 10% of the gross profits from AHRCO would be used to fund a non-profit research organization. A combination of AHRCO profits and foundation grants would allow the nonprofit to research new construction methods and materials for rehabilitation. Experience on the Cora Street project had demonstrated the need for new construction techniques to deal with old materials, as well as the need to educate architects, contractors, and laborers about the utility of rehabilitation.<sup>147</sup>

The AHRCO proposal was first unveiled to local businessmen at an exclusive conference held at the Duquesne Club in January 1967. In June another conference was held with participants from the local and state political leadership including, Governor Raymond P. Shafer, Senators Scott, Clark and Percy as well as Richard King Mellon and executives from Alcoa, Westinghouse, U.S. Steel, and other corporations. The *Cora Street*

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<sup>146</sup> "Nonprofit Housing Corporations," Address by Bernard Loshbough and Seymour Baskin before the Anti-Poverty Institute at Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio, May 22-23, 1967. Papers of Monsignor Charles Owen Rice, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh

<sup>147</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc., *AHRCO Proposal* (Pittsburgh: ACTION-Housing, Inc., 1967)14.

documentary was screened as an example of rehabilitation success.<sup>148</sup> The seven total corporations represented at the June meeting pledged \$1 million in capital in grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$250,000. In September, Loshbough and others solicited smaller companies through luncheons and other meetings and raised another \$700,000.<sup>149</sup> Based on all of these conferences, thirty-two companies joined in January 1968 to ratify the articles of incorporation.<sup>150</sup>

ACTION-Housing supplied a \$530,000 investment in the corporation, and became a primary stockholder. Bernard Loshbough sat on the executive committee of the board of directors. J. Robert Ferguson, Jr. of U.S. Steel Corporation was elected as chairman of the board; Ferguson was also serving at the time as vice-president of ACTION-Housing. AHRCO appointed Frederick H Springer, who had experience in housing rehabilitation in Boston as the president and chief executive officer. Loshbough also hired Milton A. Washington, an African-American man with experience at the Philadelphia Housing Authority and Philadelphia Housing and Urban Development offices, as vice president of administration.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> "Plan to Renovate Housing Readied," *ThePittsburgh Press*, June 7, 1967; "Dilapidated Homes Plan to be Aired," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 6, 1967; Lubove, *Volume I* 157.

<sup>149</sup> Donald L Stevens, Jr., "The Role of Nonprofit Corporations in Urban Development: A Case Study of ACTION-Housing, Inc. of Pittsburgh" (PhD Diss. Carnegie Mellon University, 1987) 192.

<sup>150</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 157;

<sup>151</sup> Stevens 174-5; Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, "History," Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, [http://www.ahrco.com/about\\_history.html](http://www.ahrco.com/about_history.html).

African-American neighborhood residents were invited to join the executive committee after the local NAACP chapter contacted AHRCO about the lack of a “Negro point of view.” Although inclusive of African-Americans while working in Homewood-Brushton, both in Neighborhood Urban Extension and the Cora Street project, ACTION-Housing had yet to grasp the importance of including African-American residents in the initial planning stages of these neighborhood efforts. In the mid-1960’s, it became increasingly apparent that African-American activists exerted influence in the neighborhoods where ACTION-Housing worked and their inclusion became a priority. African-American resident members appointed to the executive committee consisted of Canon Junius Carter, the pastor at Holy Cross Episcopal Church and also active with the Homewood-Brushton Alliance; Wilbur L. Nelson, president of the Homewood-Brushton Community Improvement Association; and Ronald R. Davenport, president of the Urban League of Pittsburgh. Two women, Frankie Pace, a representative from the Hill District and Dorothy Richardson from the Northside, who was also the leader of Citizens Against Slum Housing, rounded out the group.<sup>152</sup>

## FEDERAL INFLUENCE

Through AHRCO, ACTION-Housing attempted to exert influence on federal housing policy. Robert C. Weaver was

Delighted to enter into an association with the Board of Directors of ACTION-Housing to develop this important program which is designed to benefit not only the citizens of Pittsburgh but the people of other cities across the nation by

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<sup>152</sup> Stevens 193.

demonstrating that role that business can play in the rehabilitation of slums.<sup>153</sup>

Through self-promotion and word-of-mouth, the *Cora Street* film traveled to Capitol Hill where it was viewed by staff and senators and received strong support from Senator Percy of Illinois and Senator Clark of Pennsylvania for the “continuation and expansion” of federal aid for housing rehabilitation. A year later, the Housing Act of 1968 added sections 235 and 236 as well as “Project Rehab” to “target neighborhoods for home modernization.” The FHA also shortened the administrative red tape to quicken the reconstruction process and to facilitate private mass rehabilitation. Because of the strong relationship with the FHA, Pittsburgh became one of the first cities to participate in Project Rehab.<sup>154</sup>

In 1967, Bernard Loshbough and Seymour Baskin, the general counsel for ACTION-Housing contacted local clergy and faith-based leaders about the possibility of setting up non-profit housing corporations which could purchase and then manage the projects that AHRCO rehabilitated. Loshbough and Baskin emphasized the 1961 and 1965 Housing Acts and the fact that low interest mortgage rates were given to non-profit organizations to produce low-to-moderate income housing.<sup>155</sup> The influence, then, of the Housing Acts of

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<sup>153</sup> Stevens 194.

<sup>154</sup> Stevens 194.

<sup>155</sup> “Nonprofit Housing Corporations,” Address by Bernard Loshbough and Seymour Baskin before the Anti-Poverty Institute at Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio, May 22-23, 1967.

1961 and 1965 on ACTION-Housing's ability to produce the first large-scale rehabilitation project on Cora Street cannot be underestimated.

#### KELLY-HAMILTON: UTILIZING VACANT HOMES AND RENT SUPPLEMENTS

By mid-1969 AHRCO was up and running to fulfill the main objective to acquire, construct, rehabilitate and sell or rent houses to families of low-to-moderate income. In the first year of operation, while setting up staff and other procedural needs, 238 units of housing were in the process of being rehabilitated with twenty-two ready for occupation. These initial units employed twenty-five African-American subcontractors, and employed eighty-five people from Homewood-Brushton. AHRCO also employed twenty-five construction workers on its payroll, thus employing 135 workers from the neighborhood who were formerly unemployed or underemployed. The research and development effort shifted its focus from "substantial demolition of interior structure" and adopted a new approach of "maximum utilization of existing structure."<sup>156</sup>

The majority of the 238 units rehabilitated in 1969 were in Homewood-Brushton. The remaining twenty-eight units were located in the adjacent East Liberty neighborhood. Just prior to the incorporation of AHRCO, ACTION-Housing had financed the purchase of seventy-eight dwellings in Homewood-Brushton. The Pittsburgh Development Fund and Mellon Bank provided financing while municipal agencies helped identify buildings that were vacant,

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<sup>156</sup> Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, *Annual Report 1969: A Contrast in Housing* (Pittsburgh, PA: May 12, 1969) 1.



abandoned, or tax delinquent. Twelve of the seventy-eight dwellings were occupied. All of the houses belonged to Lawrence Knapp and his sister Katherine Knapp Otterbeim, of whom little is known. The properties were acquired in November 1967 for \$187,000. Ten homes were sold to the Pittsburgh Hospital Association and demolished for the new Homewood-Brushton Medical Center. ACTION-Housing founded Kelly-Hamilton, Inc. as the project's nonprofit sponsor and shared the development responsibilities with AHRCO after the founding of the corporation.<sup>157</sup>

Kelly-Hamilton took advantage of 221 (d)(3) subsidies, as did Cora Street, but also qualified through the FHA for rent supplements. These subsidies covered twenty-four of the sixty-six remaining units and were limited to residents with annual salaries of \$4,000 to \$4,800. Work on the homes began in April 1968 and 60% were completed by January 1969 (Figures 5.2-3).<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Stevens 195.

<sup>158</sup> Stevens 196; AHRCO, *Annual Report*, 1969 12.



Figures 5.2-3: Before and after photographs of AHRCO's Kelly-Hamilton project. From the online collection of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Collection number MSP285.B029.F39.I06).

ACTION-Housing had never intended AHRCO to manage projects after they were completed, which is why non-profit sponsors were set up. In the case of Kelly-Hamilton, Inc., ownership of the project was transferred from this nonprofit to a community development corporation set up by Pastor Canon Junius Carter of the Church of the Holy Cross and a member of AHRCO's executive committee. Holy Cross had moved to its location to Kelly and Collier Streets in 1954 and was immediately adjacent to the Kelly-Hamilton project.<sup>159</sup>

Carter's community development corporation, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Homes, Inc., was founded one month after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the riots that rocked through Pittsburgh and urban America. The corporation was formed solely to own and manage the Kelly-Hamilton project, but Carter also wanted to demonstrate that neighborhood citizen groups could "perform a positive, long term role in housing improvement." Carter appointed members of the Urban League and the Young Adult Group of the Church as members of the organization. The group proceeded to pay the mortgage through the collection of rents, select tenants, and manage the property.<sup>160</sup>

Martin Luther King Jr. Homes, Inc. reported that over 400 families applied for the sixty-six homes. The group gave preference to the few former tenants and residents who would be displaced for a new AHRCO project in the

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<sup>159</sup> Stevens 197; AHRCO, *Annual Report 1969* 3.

<sup>160</sup> Sam Spatter, "Reverend Makes Dream of Old Houses," *The Pittsburgh Press*, July 7, 1968.

neighborhood. This allowed them to avoid any major relocation of families and to provide immediate housing for those who were displaced.<sup>161</sup>

The assertion of power through control of the Kelly-Hamilton project by an African-American-run nonprofit corporation represented an overall shift in the neighborhood-based grassroots activism that took place in the late 1960's, especially following Martin Luther King's assassination. Canon Junius Carter called for a "united black community which . . . must have the major share of its economic, education, law enforcement, recreational, and housing concerns controlled by its own black residents." Carter's group continued to fight for African-American residents to control development in Homewood-Brushton by working to establish a cooperative supermarket and helping to form Forever Action Together, a federation of seventy African-American organizations from all over Pittsburgh.<sup>162</sup>

#### AHRCO INTO THE 1970's

In 1970, AHRCO and ACTION-Housing were the local leaders in housing rehabilitation under Section 236. AHRCO had close to 1270 units in the works, getting closer to reaching their goal of rehabilitating 1000 units per year. AHRCO formed initial partnerships with churches and social groups and encouraged them to take over management responsibilities which would alleviate the need to set up separate nonprofit management companies. AHRCO operated at a loss of \$161,637 in 1969, which the corporation

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<sup>161</sup> Sam Spatter, "Reverend Makes Dream of Old Houses," *The Pittsburgh Press*, July 7, 1968.

<sup>162</sup> Lubove, *Volume I* 175.

attributed to administrative set up costs. In 1970, the loss decreased to \$87,005, and by 1971 the company earned its first profit of \$63,000.<sup>163</sup>

Changes to federal and municipal policy in 1972 and 1973 seriously hindered AHRCO's ability to produce enough housing to be a profit making entity. The federal government stopped dispensing housing subsidies to Pittsburgh during this time, claiming the city was not supplying adequate municipal services to the rehabilitated housing. Pete Flaherty was elected mayor in 1969 and eroded AHRCO and ACTION-Housing's relationship with city government through his criticism of big business. Finally, the funds diverted from the corporation for research and development, and minority job training was a drain on any remaining revenue. In 1972 AHRCO lost \$1,067,049. The initial investment capital slowly disappeared with losses of \$221,657 in 1973 and \$854,674 in 1974. In 1972 President Nixon declared a moratorium on housing programs and federal subsidies were frozen in 1974 for national policy review. Without these subsidies, AHRCO had no way to finance new projects with the potential to generate income. Management issues had also proven to be a huge issue for the corporation. AHRCO had trouble identifying enough nonprofit sponsors to manage the projects they produced, and much of AHRCO's staff and resources had to be devoted to this complex task. The corporation's loss in 1974 caused a deficit of \$250,000 and the company appeared headed for bankruptcy.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Stevens 201.

<sup>164</sup> Stevens 237; ACTION-Housing, Inc., *Annual Report 2002 (Reflections on the 45 Year History of ACTION-Housing)* 7.

Milton Washington had been promoted from vice-president to president of AHRCO early in 1974. He partnered with Ronald Davenport, an attorney and Dean of the Duquesne University Law School, and offered to purchase the corporation. Although ACTION-Housing's board was reluctant to relinquish control of the organization they realized that without significant restructuring the organization would go bankrupt. The Allegheny Conference on Community Development supported the sale of the company to an African-American investment group as an increasing number of African-American activists organized to gain control of neighborhood development.<sup>165</sup>

Under Washington's direction, much of AHRCO's extraneous programming was cut, and by 1976 the company earned a net profit. Early reorganization efforts centered on the management of existing properties as well as newly constructed housing. Washington and Davenport were interested in having a controlling interest in the housing industry, and less interested in the pioneering efforts of rehabilitation. They created a subsidiary, Beacon Construction Company, and increased both rehabilitation and new construction projects. In 1976 the company produced a net profit on \$4,507 and the profits steadily increased over the next several years.<sup>166</sup> AHRCO is currently completely owned by Milton Washington and continues to focus on property management, new construction of affordable housing and limited rehabilitation of older homes.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Stevens 237-8.

<sup>166</sup> Stevens 238.

<sup>167</sup> Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, "History," Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, [http://www.ahrco.com/about\\_history.html](http://www.ahrco.com/about_history.html).

## AHRCO IN CONTEXT: THE PITTSBURGH PRESERVATION MOVEMENT

In September of 1964 the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (PHLF) was incorporated by a group of seventy-one civic leaders to address growing concern about the destruction of historical resources through urban renewal. The first project of the group was to survey all of the buildings in Allegheny County to evaluate their architectural significance; the survey was published as a book entitled *Landmark Architecture of Allegheny County*. In 1966 the Sarah Mellon Scaife Foundation awarded the group \$100,000 to establish a revolving loan fund for restoration of homes in the Mexican War Streets neighborhood of Pittsburgh. One of the group's aims with the project was to generate investment in the neighborhood while maintaining a racial and demographic balance. In May of 1969 the group worked with the Urban Redevelopment Authority to chose buildings in the Manchester neighborhood of Pittsburgh to be restored. The Manchester program was the catalyst for the development of Neighborhood Housing Services in 1968, a nonprofit corporation founded by bankers, local government officials, Northside residents, and members of PHLF. A revolving loan fund was established as a financial resource for homeowners. The initial revolving loan fund was financed through the Sarah Mellon Scaife Foundation and ACTION-Housing, Inc. acted as the agent on the project.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, *Five Year Report to Our Members and to the Community, 1964-1969* (Pittsburgh: November, 1969) vii, 1, 4; Stephen A. Klimment, AIA, ed., *Neighborhood Conservation: A source book* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1976) 84-85; Real Estate Research Corporation, *Neighborhood Preservation: A Catalog of Local Programs* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975) 45.

By 1969 the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority was lauding rehabilitation and neighborhood conservation or “improvement.” In the URA’s 1969 publication “The Changing City,” for example, the Lower Hill Redevelopment project is still heralded a success. However, Epiphany Church, saved from the wrecking ball by citizen protest, appears in a photograph next to the monolithic Civic Arena with the caption stating that the “traditional architecture adds interest to this view.” (Figure 5.4)<sup>169</sup>

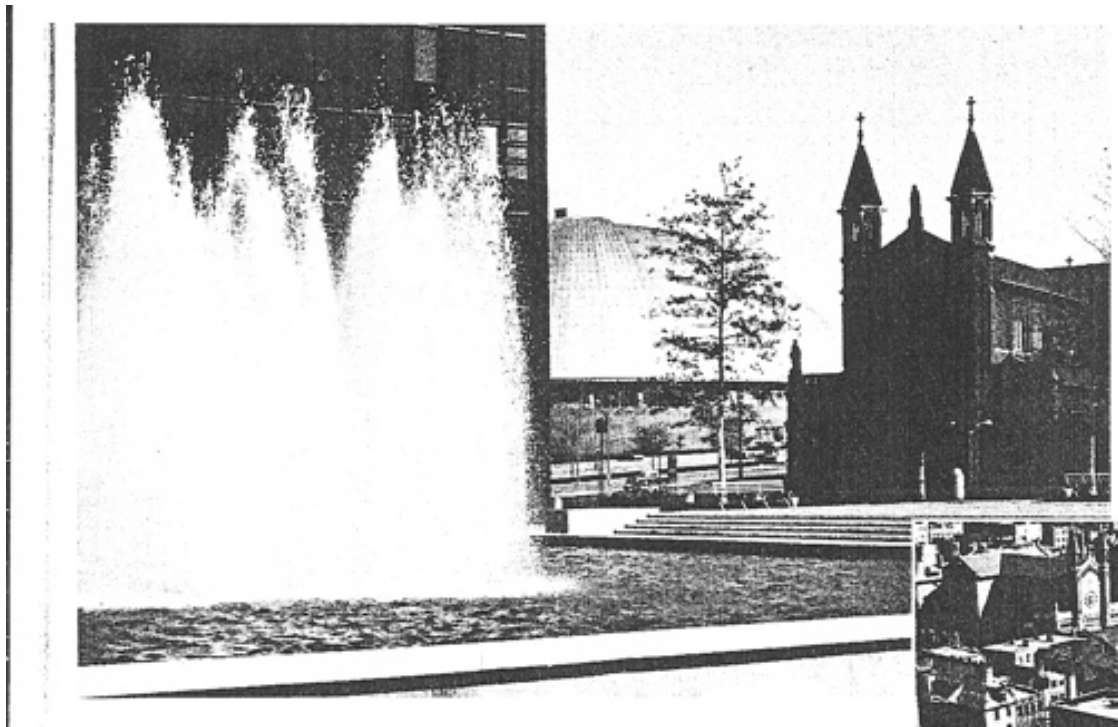


Figure 5.4: Photo of Epiphany Church with the Civic Arena in the background. From Urban Renewal Authority of Pittsburgh, *The Changing City: Report of the Urban Renewal Authority of Pittsburgh 1969*, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Library and Archives Division, 25.

## ACTION-HOUSING, INC. TODAY

<sup>169</sup> Urban Renewal Authority of Pittsburgh, *The Changing City: Report of the Urban Renewal Authority of Pittsburgh 1969*, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Library and Archives Division, 6, 25.



Following the sale of AHRCO, ACTION-Housing went through a period of transition in staff management that resulted in new policy formation to match the decrease in available federal funding. This period of transition was overseen by two short-lived executive directors, William Farkas in 1973, and Paul Brophy in 1975, who both reacted to the loss of federal subsidies by focusing ACTION-Housing staff on providing research for other nonprofits and foundations as well as the management of the current housing projects still owned by ACTION-Housing. This allowed the organization to operate on a minimal budget while finances were evaluated as well as the existing housing developments owned by the nonprofit. When Paul Brophy left in 1977, Jonathan Zimmer was appointed executive director. Zimmer had joined ACTION-Housing in 1972 as director of supportive services. Upon his promotion, he inherited a budget close to bankruptcy and the threat of Housing and Urban Development foreclosing on the existing housing developments.<sup>170</sup>

Zimmer quickly acted to build on Brophy's work at syndicating the existing housing developments to private investors as well as take advantage of the new federal subsidy available under Section 8. Using these techniques, Zimmer successfully avoided the foreclosures on the existing housing developments. To rebuild the Pittsburgh Development Fund and finances at ACTION-Housing, Zimmer developed small-scale programs which received city and county funding. These included Operation Paint Brush, which gave

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<sup>170</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, Volume II: The Post-Steel Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996) 174-175. ACTION-Housing, Inc., *Annual Report 2007 (50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Annual Report)* 30.

small grants for homeowners to paint the exterior of their houses, and Rent Brake, which weatherized rental units for landlords who agreed to freeze their rents for two years. Zimmer guided the organization back on its feet through these programs and is attributed with shifting the organization's focus to providing more social programs such as job training and assisted living for the elderly and physically disabled. Between 1977 and 1982 the organization developed and improved 6,342 units of housing with a dollar value of \$40,529,351.<sup>171</sup> Zimmer retired in 2006 and Larry Swanson became the fifth executive director in the organization's fifty-year history (Figure 5.5).<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> ACTION-Housing, Inc., *Annual Report 1982 (Twenty-five years of housing and neighborhood improvements)* 23.

<sup>172</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, Volume II: The Post-Steel Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996) 174-175. Interview with Jonathan Zimmer.

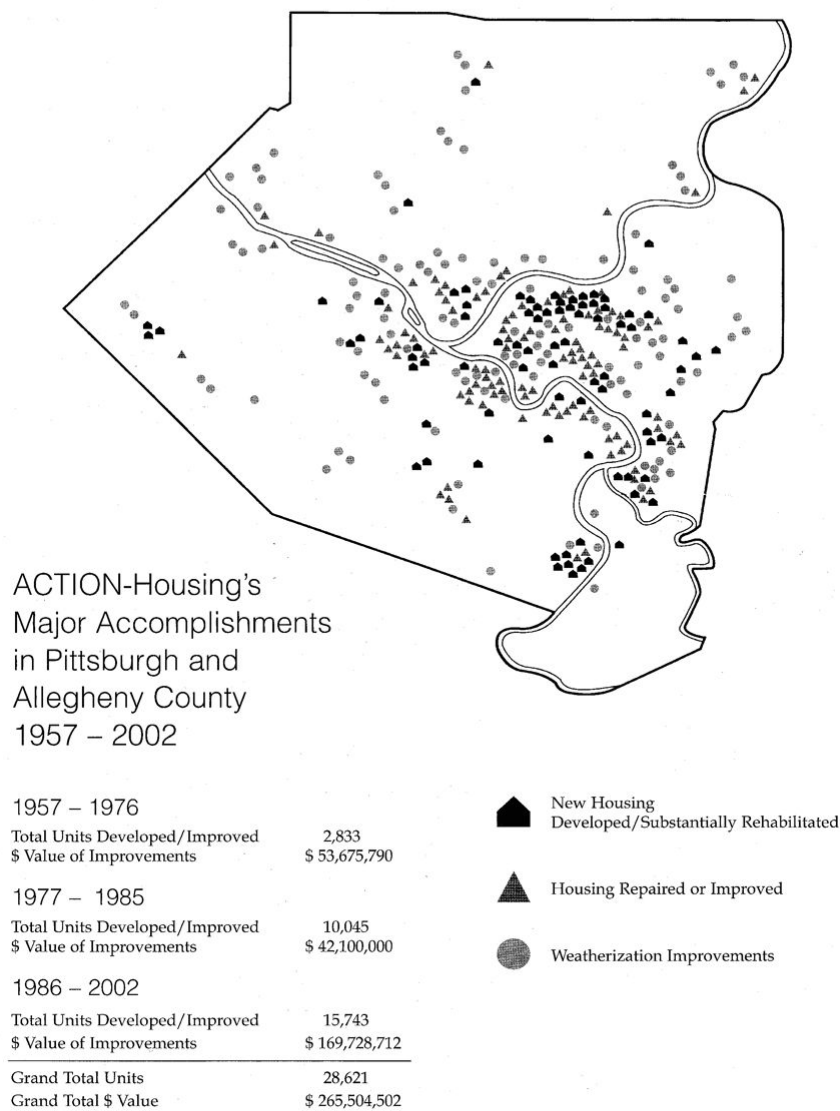


Figure 5.5: Map showing ACTION-Housing's impact on Allegheny County between 1957 and 2002. From ACTION-Housing, Inc., Annual Report 2002: 45 Years of Investment in Housing, Neighborhoods and People.

## CONCLUSION

The Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation received broad-based initial support from the local business leadership. However, financing rehabilitation left the company at the mercy of federal housing and urban development policy. This caused the corporation to falter, until it came under new leadership and was reinvented as a company that focused on both new construction and rehabilitation that made the company less dependent on federal subsidies. Concurrent with ACTION-Housing's attempt to pioneer large-scale rehabilitation were grassroots efforts that gave way to the formation of The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation. The rising influence of AHRCO and PHLF in the 1960's was demonstrated by local government's acceptance of neighborhood conservation and rehabilitation as powerful tools for facilitating urban change.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis traces the reaction of an institutionalized agency, ACTION-Housing, Inc., to Pittsburgh urban renewal policy in the 1950's. Its main finding is that the creative response of ACTION-Housing's leadership in the 1960's helped introduce citizen participation and housing rehabilitation to mainstream Pittsburgh. ACTION-Housing, Inc. had a transformative effect on Pittsburgh's housing market through the construction of new, and rehabilitation of old, homes for Pittsburgh citizens. Bernard Loshbough and James Cunningham developed Neighborhood Urban Extension to revitalize Homewood-Brushton through Self-Help Urban Renewal. This led to the development of the Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, with its ambitious mission and financial backing of the elite members of Pittsburgh's private sector. ACTION-Housing was successful in achieving a shift in this corporate support from investment in large-scale renewal efforts to smaller scale, neighborhood based planning.

Urban historians, theorists, and sociologists that have written about Pittsburgh tend to focus on the periods directly leading up to, and directly following this study. The exception is Roy Lubove who has studied this period extensively to show how early efforts in community participation and creative development gave rise to the community development movement in the 1970's. In general, the 1960's are dealt with in a few quick pages, often including the word "turmoil." This thesis suggests that to overlook this pivotal point in Pittsburgh's

history does a disservice by not recognizing the early efforts that provided the framework for future successes.

The most significant omission of this thesis is that the often easily accessible ACTION-Housing material overshadows the people of Homewood-Brushton. Their voices exist mostly in the ways that ACTION-Housing has recorded them. This omission is mainly due to difficulty in tracking down neighborhood leaders from this era and the author's own unfamiliarity with the neighborhood. Related to the later section regarding further study of these issues, a complete historical overview of Homewood-Brushton as related to the black power movement and the rise of its influence on future planning efforts, would go far toward dispelling many of the misconceptions about this multi-layered neighborhood. One common misconception is a rumor that existed in 1960 and still exists today. Many people think that the clearance of the Lower Hill led to a large influx of poor blacks into Homewood-Brushton, and this caused the neighborhood to rapidly decline. While it was difficult at the time to track displaced families, this does not appear to be the case. Only a small percentage of Lower Hill families moved to Homewood-Brushton and the neighborhood's decline is more likely attributed to vast disinvestment in the area by private enterprise and the municipal government, which began years before the wrecking ball swung on the Lower Hill. This common belief did positively influence local decision makers, in the sense that it led them to realize that the displacement of families would only shift the problems occurring in slums to other neighborhoods. This belief led to the local administration's support of institutionalized efforts to creatively address

neighborhood decline and allowed for the acceptance of the preservation movement in Pittsburgh.

ACTION-Housing's storage warehouse burned down at some point and so detailed architectural drawings, specifications, financials, and correspondence were not readily available for both the Cora Street project and AHRCO. What was available was the excellent publication *Cora Street*, authored by Arthur P. Ziegler, currently the president of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, as well as a film by the same name produced by ACTION-Housing. Additional material was available through ACTION-Housing Annual Reports, where the Cora Street project has always been heralded as a catalyst for pioneering rehabilitation for low-to-moderate income housing.

A large part of AHRCO's failure to introduce widespread rehabilitation as a corporate institution was due to significant transformation in FHA and HUD policy in the early 1970's. A more broad-based nationwide analysis of rehabilitation projects that used Section 221 (d)(3) and other Federal subsidies in the 1960's, especially in comparison to the current Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit and the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit would provide guidance for future programs that could generate an increase in vacant building initiatives.

The figure of Frederick Bigger is prominent in both Pittsburgh's early planning as well as Federal Urban Redevelopment policy. An original member of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) and a close friend of Clarence Stein and Lewis Mumford, Bigger was also the chief planner for the

Greenbelt Town program. Although Bigger's role in Pittsburgh's development is discussed by John Bauman and Edward Muller in their book *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh 1889-1943*, it appears that scholarship has overlooked this important figure, especially his relationship to the RPAA and its stated mission. Bigger even submitted a plan for The Buhl Foundation funded, planned community on Mt. Washington which was awarded to Clarence Stein and Henry Wright and became Chatham Village. Future scholars should consider pursuing this topic in partnership with the Clarence S. Stein Institute for Urban and Landscape Studies.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> John F. Bauman and Edward K. Muller, eds. *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889-1943* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) 140-142.



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