



April's p4 Pittsburgh summit on sustainable urban development opened at the city's Energy Innovation Center with a welcome from Mayor William Peduto. The event attracted international, national and local experts as well as civic and nonprofit leaders, and took place in a former trade school building that also is being transformed to a more sustainable use.

FORGING A VISION

THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH AND ITS FOUNDATION
COMMUNITY ARE SPEARHEADING A MAJOR EFFORT
TO CREATE A NEW MODEL OF URBAN GROWTH
AND DEVELOPMENT THAT IS INNOVATIVE,
INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE.

BY JEFFERY FRASER.

PHOTOS BY JOSHUA FRANZOS.



PITTSBURGH'S DECADES-LONG RECOVERY FROM THE COLLAPSE OF ITS ONCE-MIGHTY STEEL AND MANUFACTURING ECONOMY WAS MORE THAN A REMARKABLE ACT OF SURVIVAL. AS IT TURNS OUT, THE CITY QUIETLY POSITIONED ITSELF FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

New urban models are emerging as market and demographic forces drive a migration away from the sprawl of suburbia and into cities. From Copenhagen to Chattanooga, cities are increasingly cultivating innovation economies and redesigning themselves around sustainable strategies that place a premium on quality of life, environment and opportunity as the means of attracting people and investment, and improving their chances for growth and stability.

And Pittsburgh finds itself poised to do the same. It boasts a strong innovation corridor fed by its research universities, a revitalized Downtown where more and more people want to live, and a capacity for public-private collaboration that's been battle-tested in times of economic hardship. Meanwhile, the city's political and community leaders are unafraid of new ideas that hundreds of acres of shovel-ready development projects provide an opportunity to explore.

The question is whether Pittsburgh will take the steps necessary to stitch those pieces together and complete the journey to becoming a 21st-century sustainable city.

In April, Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto in partnership with The Heinz Endowments launched p4, an initiative focused on the themes of planet, people, place and performance with the goal of creating a model for sustainable, innovative and inclusive development. p4 also is intended to forge a shared vision of a city that aspires to become a leader in the growing movement rather than a latecomer scrambling to catch up. To help inform the city's transition, a two-day summit introduced local stakeholders to experts in sustainable cities and innovation economies from the United States and Europe. The event, which took place at Pittsburgh's Energy Innovation Center, attracted almost 350 invited guests, including a major delegation from Nordic countries.



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André Heinz, board member, The Heinz Endowments



“We are at a moment in Pittsburgh’s history where there is a lot of groundbreaking, a lot of brick-and-mortar projects that are beginning,” Endowments board member André Heinz told the summit audience. “This, in my mind, is a time when we should say: Here we are in the 21st century with a lot of change going on. What is our model? How are we preparing ourselves for things that can be very disruptive to standard ways of thinking about how we live, whether that is transportation or energy or our information structure? How do we think about fundamental issues of equity and access?”

The p4 initiative offers a framework for growing jobs, enhancing opportunities for all, attracting capital, revitalizing neighborhoods and improving the quality of life. The framework advocates for solutions that support people with good jobs and a range of transportation options; are inclusive and representative of the community; enhance rather than denigrate the environment; and raise the bar for design and architecture to enrich the city’s character and livability. These efforts also are expected to emphasize strategies that nurture the city’s innovation economy, embed sustainable development in the city’s DNA and use performance metrics that enable anyone to track progress.

“My hope for the conference was that it would provide a shock to the system by offering Pittsburgh a vision of what a different model of urban sustainability might look like for our community,” says Endowments President Grant Oliphant. “We’ve been moving along and slowly embracing things like bike lanes and riverfront development. We’ve made a lot of headway. But the rest of the world has been moving very quickly to create and reinvent their cities as centers for innovation and sustainability.”

“The innovative economy is collapsing back to the cores of central cities ... Advanced industries are doing more and more of their R&D through networks of researchers, entrepreneurs, investors. That revalues proximity, density, being close to advanced research institutions and medical campuses.”

Bruce Katz, vice president at the Brookings Institution and founding director of the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program

Perhaps the most notable examples of such cities are found in the Nordic countries of Europe, where several have explored, adopted and refined sustainable strategies and practices for more than a decade.

Malmö, Sweden, for example, transformed itself from an industrial city in decline to one of growth and urban sustainability. It replaced a derelict shipyard with an eco-district of energy-efficient homes, shops and offices, bike trails and footpaths, few cars and its own renewable energy supply. Growth industries include information technology and bio- and medical technology. The city announced an ambitious goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2020. And it recently set out to narrow health inequities related to income, housing and other factors.

“The first thing is to be inspired that such things are possible,” says John Manooch, founder and director of Resource Vision, a sustainable architecture and urban design studio in Stockholm,

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William Peduto, mayor, City of Pittsburgh

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Sweden. “Urban development is complex. The Nordic cities have planned carefully and have executed well and a huge amount of that can be transferred.”

Several factors suggest that Pittsburgh has arrived at a moment of opportunity to set a course for becoming a sustainable city in ways the Nordic countries have shown is possible.

Pittsburgh already has a substantial innovation economy anchored by two major research schools, Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, and a cluster of advanced technology companies in fields such as energy, computer software and biotechnology. Moreover, the geography of that core of innovation, with researchers and companies concentrated in Downtown and mid-town neighborhoods, is well suited to new market demands.

“In the ’70s, we had a closed innovation model in the U.S. where companies wanted to be on an isolated corporate campus to keep their secrets secret. But a different geography of innovation is emerging,” says Bruce Katz, vice president and founding director of the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. “The innovative economy is collapsing back to the cores of central cities. It’s partly because of demographics—the shifting workforce is demanding places where they can live, work and play. But, more important,

advanced industries are doing more and more of their R&D through networks of researchers, entrepreneurs, investors. That revalues proximity, density, being close to advanced research institutions and medical campuses.”

Mayor Peduto believes this is an opportunity to create a lasting role for Pittsburgh in national and international debates about post-industrial cities. “Pittsburgh can redefine what cities are for, how they work, how they look and feel, and who they serve,” he says.

The region still has thorny environmental and social equity issues to resolve. Its air quality is among the worst in the nation in terms of ozone and fine particulate pollution. And its workforce is among the least diverse. Shifting further toward an innovation economy and adopting sustainable urban design standards could help ease both. For example, half of all STEM jobs—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—in the United States don’t require a four-year college degree and pay \$53,000 on average, according to a Brookings Institution study.

Pittsburgh is only now drafting its first comprehensive plan, presenting an opportunity to set sustainable standards for development in the city for years to come. And several early stage development projects provide an opportunity to significantly advance a sustainable agenda.

Among them is the 178-acre site of a former coke works in the city’s Hazelwood neighborhood that was purchased by the Endowments and three other local foundations for the purpose of developing a mixed-use community designed to sustainable standards. The Endowments also has begun working with residents and community organizations to address housing, education and other issues to put the neighborhood in a better position to benefit from the brownfield development and to avoid isolating the older community from the new.

The idea of using sustainable strategies to reinvent cities has gained considerable momentum in recent years, and for good reason.

“What had been thought of as singularly environmental issues or moral justice issues are now business issues,” says Court Gould, executive director of the nonprofit Sustainable Pittsburgh. “The opportunity for Pittsburgh is to be an accelerator of market trends, to advance a sustainable growth model and to not be stuck in old models that are obsolete.” *h*