

SUSTAINED VISION

IN THE YEAR SINCE THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS AND THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH CO-HOSTED AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE URBAN REVITALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS HAVE BEGUN OR MOVED FORWARD WITH RENEWED VIGOR. MOST IMPORTANT, THE MOMENTUM BEHIND INSISTING THAT THE WORK MEETS SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS HAS NOT ABATED. BY JEFFERY FRASER

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Urban sustainability experts from Chattanooga, Tenn., to Malmö, Sweden were brought to Pittsburgh last April to help the region plot a course toward a sustainable future that leverages its innovation economy and considers quality of life, environment and opportunity among the principles guiding its growth.

The p4 Summit, hosted by the city and The Heinz Endowments, focused on the themes of people, planet, place and performance, and introduced a cross-section of community leaders to sustainability practices that are transforming European and American cities, particularly those with industrial legacies. Over the past year, interest in adopting such approaches to reinvent Pittsburgh has never been greater.

New housing, office and retail developments have broken ground in the city's Strip District as part of a shared vision among developers, city officials, residents and others that includes public access to banks of the Allegheny River and green strategies to help address water quality issues.

Along the Monongahela River, preparation of the city's last great steel-era brownfield for its new role as a sustainable mixed-use community within the Hazelwood neighborhood is nearing completion, and the recruiting of tenants is underway. Improvements throughout Hazelwood also are taking place as part of an effort to retain current residents and allow them to benefit from the revitalization.

While Pittsburgh already was home to the largest district in the world to respond to the international Architecture 2030 Challenge, the city continues to pursue ambitious goals for slashing energy and water use in buildings and trimming transportation

emissions. Buildings that represent 60 percent of Downtown square footage surpassed the 2015 energy-saving goal early and are closing in on 2020 objectives.

And at city hall, a framework for future development is taking shape with urban sustainability principles ranging from social equity to environmental impact that are reflected in codes, new metrics and the city's first-ever comprehensive plan.

"p4 helped to marry growing public aspirations for such things as best-in-class architecture and the integration of new development and existing communities with an awareness on the part of the development community that this can actually pay off, that it's working around the world and it can work in Pittsburgh," said Court Gould, executive director of the nonprofit Sustainable Pittsburgh. "[p4] raised the bar for everybody."

Pittsburgh's advantages in its pursuit of a sustainable future include a substantial innovation economy anchored by major research universities, a proven capacity for public-private collaboration, and willing community and political leadership.

The city's challenges, however, are not insignificant. Racial and ethnic minorities claim only 11 percent of the region's workforce, one of the smallest shares in metropolitan America. Levels of air toxics and fine particulate pollution are among the worst in the nation. And the quality of the region's rivers and streams has long suffered from municipal sewer runoff and industrial insults.

No single project better embodies the principles of sustainable development than Almona. The 178-acre site of a former steel and coke works in Hazelwood was bought in 2002 by The Heinz Endowments and the Claude Worthington Benedum, Richard King Mellon and McCune foundations, with designs on creating a model sustainable community.

The site has been graded, and construction of the infrastructure is nearing completion. A master plan is in hand that calls for a mix of housing, commerce and transportation efficiency that not only avoids environmental harm but helps address some lingering regional problems, including an overburdened storm water and sewage network that routinely discharges into the rivers.

Meanwhile, the Endowments and others have supported improvements, such as upgrading existing



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housing stock and opening a community center and a neighborhood school. These efforts focus on shoring up Hazelwood and raising the quality of life of residents who've endured years of economic decline, so they might share the opportunities that new development presents rather than be displaced by it.

A few miles west of Hazelwood, the recent selection of a consulting team led by the Philadelphia-based urban design firm Interface Studio Architects has enabled the city to begin drawing a plan for an Uptown eco-innovation district that reflects sustainability practices in all aspects of development. It's seen as a potential innovation hub with mixed-income housing, cyclist- and pedestrian-friendly streets, and redesigned transit in a corridor that has long suffered from disinvestment, despite its strategic location.

"Two-thirds of employment in the Pittsburgh MSA is in Downtown and Oakland. Here is the connector between the two that is in need of redevelopment," said Andrew McElwaine, the Endowments' vice president of Sustainability and the Environment. "It's a huge opportunity."

The character of Downtown has begun to shift under an initiative announced last year to rethink

transportation, streets, sidewalks and other infrastructure to better accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians, ease traffic congestion, and enhance the livability of the center city. Within the past year, Penn Avenue—a main thoroughfare stretching through several

East End neighborhoods and into Downtown—has been redesigned so that half of the street through the theater district is dedicated to bicycle traffic.

The sustainability principles that are being written into the city's new comprehensive plan will set the course for future development. Work also is underway to create metrics to assess larger-scale redevelopment and the awarding of public incentives through the lenses of design, social equity, environment and public health impact, and other sustainability principles.

Just how far the city has traveled down the road to sustainability is expected to be a key topic of discussion at an encore of the p4 Summit scheduled for October, which will focus on applying the equity lens across the range of sustainability goals.

"We still want the inspiring speakers," said Mr. McElwaine. "But we also want to see some substance after 18 months." **h**

Last year's p4 Pittsburgh conference launched an initiative to promote new sustainable and inclusive approaches to design, jobs training and ways of growing the region's advanced-technology expertise.