Serving the Citizens: Options For Using Public Facilities And Providing Community Services

Carnegie Mellon University
Center for Economic Development
UTDC Suite 208
4516 Henry Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Phone: 412.268.9880
Fax: 412.268.9828
www.smartpolicy.org

Smart Policy for Innovative Regions

May 2005
Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the Center for Economic Development. Lena Andrews conducted the research and GIS analysis. Jerry Paytas, Ph.D., developed the final recommendations and analysis of community opportunities. Bob Gradeck provided critical insight on the opportunities for specific communities and also made available his considerable expertise on community and property data. This research was funded through the City of Pittsburgh Neighborhood Needs program through the office of Councilman Bill Peduto. We further wish to thank Mr. Peduto and Dan Gilman for their time and advice during the course of the project.

The CED is affiliated with the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University. Established in 1968 and renamed in 1992 in honor of the late U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania, the Heinz School improves the ability of the public, private and non-profit sectors to address important problems and issues facing society.

Our offices are located at the
University Technology Development Center
4516 Henry Street, Suite 208
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
Phone: 412.268.9880
Fax: 412.268.9828
www.smartpolicy.org

Our mission

The Carnegie Mellon Center for Economic Development (CED) was established in 1987 as an applied research center bringing academic resources to bear on key issues in regional economic development.

The CED provides the research and policy intelligence to foster an innovative region. The CED provides strategic and policy support for technology and economic development. Our services include technical assistance in policy and strategy to guide action, economic analysis and modeling, mapping, and benchmarking and timely analysis of key issues.

Caveats

This report represents the work of the Center for Economic Development. The opinions and conclusions are those of the authors alone. This report does not represent the conclusions, views or official positions of Carnegie Mellon University or any of its corporate officers. Furthermore it does not represent the conclusions, views or official positions of the City of Pittsburgh or any of its agents or officers.

This report aggregated information from a variety of public agencies and sources. The Center for Economic Development does not accept responsibility for any deficiencies in the official records.
A community center for every neighborhood

Pittsburgh’s extensive population loss has left the city with more infrastructure than is needed by current residents. While population loss can be viewed as a negative, it is also an opportunity for consolidation and more efficient provision of services. This paper attempts to locate concentrations of young and old populations in the City of Pittsburgh and examine the locations of current services. The goal is to identify opportunities to consolidate social service provision in areas of high concentration of need, creating super community centers that consolidate recreational, youth, senior and social services for the neighborhood.

Where is the need?

The map below shows block groups rated by a combined indicator of child and elderly population density. Areas that are dark blue have dense concentrations of elderly population and children, while yellow areas have the lowest concentrations. The red dots are closed Pittsburgh Public School facilities that could serve as locations for service centers. As can be seen in the map below, there are many patches of blue, consisting of neighboring block groups with dense populations in need of social services. The areas that are excellent candidates for super community centers are colored blue.

Areas of Dense Elderly and Child Populations¹

¹ Data is from Census 2000. All GIS files are from City of Pittsburgh GIS.
There are currently many facilities operating in the City of Pittsburgh, providing social services to its residents. The map above shows all public facilities in the city, along with closing Pittsburgh Public Schools surrounded by a 0.25 and 0.5 mile buffer.

Community Buildings and Facilities in the City of Pittsburgh

Legend
- Closing Schools
- Public Schools
- Public-Owned Buildings

Senior Centers
- Other Provider
- City of Pittsburgh
- Libraries
- Firehouses
- Police Stations

Buffers:
- 1/4 Mile Buffer
- 1/2 Mile Buffer
- Neighborhoods
**The Elderly**

Because the elderly and children use social services more than the general population, they are the focus of this analysis. The next map focuses on the elderly, and shows all existing senior centers along with the seniors that use these centers, represented by dots. This map shows many senior centers in close proximity to one another, which implies an opportunity for consolidation. The blue flags are the closing Pittsburgh Public Schools surrounded by a .25 and .5 mile buffer. Many of these schools are located close to existing senior centers, particularly in Homewood and the South Side.
Children

The next map shows all children who attend the Pittsburgh Public Schools. This is an indicator of not just child population, but of lower-income child population. Lower-income children are more likely to attend public than private schools, and are more likely to be in need of the types social services provided by a community center. There are high concentrations of children attending school near Homewood Montessori and Baxter in Homewood, Rogers Middle School, and Beltzhoover.
The two tables below provide summary statistics on the elderly and youth population within the .25 and .5 buffers of the closing public schools. A substantial number of elderly and youth live near Baxter, Beltzhoover, Homewood Montessori, Rogers, and Arlington Middle School. It is important to note that Spring Garden and South Vo-Tech both contain river area within their buffers, while Chartiers, Regent Square and Baxter contain area outside of the city. This may result in lower numbers for these schools. Besides Regent Square and Chartiers, every school has a higher percentage of children and elderly living in poverty in its .5-mile proximity than the city average.

### Within 1/4 Mile Buffer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Children (0-17)</th>
<th>Elderly (65+)</th>
<th>Children in Poverty</th>
<th>Elderly in Poverty</th>
<th>Children % in Poverty</th>
<th>Elderly % in Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Garden</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartiers</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baxter</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homewood Montessori</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connelley Technical Inst.</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regent Square</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Vo-Tech.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beltzhoover</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington Middle</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Total</td>
<td>83,347</td>
<td>69,346</td>
<td>20,252</td>
<td>8,148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Average</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Within 1/2 Mile Buffer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Children (0-17)</th>
<th>Elderly (65+)</th>
<th>Children in Poverty</th>
<th>Elderly in Poverty</th>
<th>Children % in Poverty</th>
<th>Elderly % in Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>2,669</td>
<td>1,166</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Garden</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartiers</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baxter</td>
<td>2,158</td>
<td>1,047</td>
<td>1,170</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homewood Montessori</td>
<td>1,778</td>
<td>1,173</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connelley Technical Inst.</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regent Square</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Vo-Tech.</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beltzhoover</td>
<td>2,054</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington Middle</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Total</td>
<td>83,347</td>
<td>69,346</td>
<td>20,252</td>
<td>8,148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Average</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Above average values are in bold typeface
Summary of Analysis

Our preliminary analysis identifies clusters of block groups that could serve as candidates for super service community centers, shown in blue on the initial map. Some of the closing Pittsburgh Public School buildings are located within these clusters and in proximity to high concentrations of senior center attendees and public school students. These schools -- Homewood Montessori and Baxter in Homewood and Beltzhoover, Arlington Middle School and South Vo-Tech in the South Side – have great potential to serve as community super centers.

Need Indicators Surrounding Selected Closing Pittsburgh Public Schools
Next, we examine two neighborhoods to see how the community could use of the sites to better serve residents. The preliminary analysis focused on areas of need, but in order to make the best use of these facilities, we also need to consider the following factors:

1. Where (and what) is the need? There are a variety of needs to be considered, such as the need for recreational space, for non-degree education, or for social services.

2. What is the community identity? The characteristics of neighborhood need may also be reflected in a community’s identity – an area with mostly retirees is less likely to need childcare. Consideration must also be given to cultural aspects of the community. A class in how to play Bocce might be a success in some neighborhoods, but fail to draw any interest in others. Other characteristics, such as the mix of renters and owners, family or singles, should be reflected in the program mix for a center.

3. How is the market? Communities with strong and healthy private markets for real estate present a different set of opportunities and challenges. In these communities, there is greater opportunity to divest property and facilities and return it to the tax rolls. In these cases, however, it is necessary to consider how market opportunities affect the community. A school facility could be converted to apartments or condos, but if this kind of development reduces the property values of nearby single-family homes, then there may be no net gain.

4. Where is the access? Pittsburgh’s topography presents serious challenges for mobility. Furthermore, while we are generally well served by public transit, some sites will be served by a higher frequency of buses or greater number of stops. Frequency of service should receive a higher weight in these considerations, as long as the stop is accessible to the facility.

5. What is the benefit? The issue is not merely the scale of benefit, but that we consider how the benefit is distributed. To make these decisions on the basis of improving the bottom line of the school district or the city, then we have missed the opportunity to better serve the citizens. Public property is in the hands of many units of government, but they all serve the same customer, and it is the ultimate benefit to our residents that should guide the decision process.
Growing Opportunities: The South Side

In the just three wards in southern Pittsburgh\(^2\), there are approximately 700 acres of publicly owned land. Some of this land is not usable due to the slope of the site, but these parcels are generally valued to reflect these challenges. At an average fair market value of $7.5 per square foot, the property is worth more than $225 million. If public agencies were to divest only 1/5 of their holding, it would generate an estimated $46 million that would generate more than $1 million annually in taxes to the city and school district. While the market in many parts of the city is weak, the South Side Flats has enjoyed extraordinary growth, making this a real opportunity. Once private investment has improved the property, the potential return could be significantly higher.

Public Properties and Community Facilities in the South Side Flats

The Arlington Middle School

Arlington is one of the areas of need identified by the study, but the closing of the middle school does not present an opportunity to consolidate services in that facility. There is a bus route that serves the school property, but the service is limited to this one route that does not provide sufficient frequency of service. Furthermore, the existing pool and gym facilities are located just down the road.

---

\(^2\) The 16th, 17th, and 18th wards include three of the school in the southern part of the city where an opportunity was identified.
These existing facilities have the same level of access as the school site and could connect to the proposed South Side Park.

**Beltzhoover**

The Beltzhoover facility is circumnavigated by a bus route that stops no closer than 2-3 blocks from the facility. This building raises concerns not just about the proximity of transit access, but also the frequency. Similar to Arlington, there are existing facilities at Warrington that also offer better proximity to bus routes than the school building.
South Vo Tech

The South Vo Tech facility represents the greatest single opportunity in the three South wards examined. This site has more than 6 acres valued at more than $6.5 million ($24 / SF). If the property were converted to apartments, even at a lower market value of $22/SF, it would generate more than $143,000 in annual property taxes. If there property were converted to higher value uses, such as office/residential combinations or condominiums, the site would generate more than $500,000 in annual property taxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Vo Tech</th>
<th>6.19 acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Market Value:</td>
<td>$ 6,570,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future Uses</th>
<th>FMV / SF</th>
<th>City Taxes</th>
<th>SD Taxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condo/Townhouse</td>
<td>$ 96</td>
<td>$ 279,559</td>
<td>$ 344,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office/Apt Over</td>
<td>$ 45</td>
<td>$ 131,043</td>
<td>$ 161,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td>$ 22</td>
<td>$ 64,066</td>
<td>$ 78,955</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is more to consider than simply tax revenue. Since the South Side generally represents an area of low need with a strong market, there are better opportunities to turn public land to the private sector. The South Side is currently served by scattered public facilities with good public transit access along the east-west corridor thorough the neighborhoods. The access through this corridor reduces the need to consolidate services to provide greater convenience, but there is the possibility to generate higher benefit by created a north-south access that would transect the existing east-west corridor.

The planned South Side Park provides an opportunity to create a north-south community corridor anchored by the Library and Ormsby facility on one end and the South Side Park and Arlington gym and pool on the other.
Energize the Core: Homewood

Homewood represents a contrasting opportunity to the South Side. Property values and market demand limit the prospect for selling assets to the private sector. There is a significant amount of publicly owned land and dozens of community and social service providers scattered throughout the neighborhood. Public agencies own approximately 114 acres in Homewood. If 1/5 of this land were divested it would generate less than $5.2 million from the sale and less than $125,000 in annual tax revenue. Most of this property is scattered throughout the neighborhood, making it more difficult to redevelop.

Furthermore, having scattered service providers also scatters the traffic. While the neighborhood generally enjoys good transit access, co-locating these service providers would reduce the “Bus Stop Shuffle” that can consume a great deal of time, or even discourage individuals from seeking out the range of services available to them. If the services were consolidated in a community super center, the intensified traffic would provide a base of demand to support business development. Energizing a core area in this way increases the prospects of development taking root, which is not the case with scattered development in a weak market.
In the area around the old Homewood Montessori facility there is an existing base of publicly owned property and providers of public and social services that could be consolidated into community plaza anchored by the school, library, YMCA and CCAC Homewood-Brushton Center. Furthermore there are several dozen agencies, clinics and services around this core that could be consolidated in the Montessori building or buildings within the “plaza.”
Conclusion

In order to take advantage of these kinds of opportunities we need to consider first and foremost how to best serve the residents of the affected communities. We must also have a dialogue that includes a variety of relevant stakeholders, not just the schools and the city, but also the county, state and private and nonprofit enterprises. Too often we build a new facility that will better serve the organization and its clients. Yet, from the perspective presented here, these investments are a lost opportunity if they do not consider the variety of needs of the community. When these investments are isolated from other service providers, or in areas with poor access, then the public benefit is unnecessarily reduced.

This report suggests the variety and scale of benefit that would result from a more inclusive planning process about the use and reuse of public facilities. Conducting a community dialogue that considers public property more broadly, and assesses it within the contexts of community conditions and needs, creates a foundation to better serve the residents of today and tomorrow.