

# Placemaking in Pittsburgh: Uses and Considerations Regarding Vacant Land



The Major in Ethics, History, and Public Policy  
Senior Capstone  
December 13, 2016

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## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank several individuals and organizations for their various contributions to our Senior Capstone course in Ethics, History, and Public Policy. Without such input, our work would not be possible.

- Councilman Daniel Gilman, *City of Pittsburgh Council District 8*
- Councilman R. Daniel Lavelle, *City of Pittsburgh Council District 6*
- Councilman Reverend Ricky Burgess, *City of Pittsburgh Council District 9*
- Cassie Miller, *Carnegie Mellon University History Department*
- Kryn Hoyer-Winfield, *The Urban Redevelopment Authority*
- 2016 p4 Pittsburgh Conference, *October 18-19, 2016*
- Pittsburgh Housing Summit, *University of Pittsburgh, November 10-12, 2016*
- Michelle Sandidge, *The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh*
- Kate Giammarise, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
- Jacob Pawlak, *The Urban Redevelopment Authority*
- Diana Reid, *PNC*
- Thomas Cummings, *The Urban Redevelopment Authority*
- Jamie Reese, *Fourth Economy*
- Matthew Tschabold, *The Portland Housing Bureau*

We would especially like to thank our professor, Danielle Wenner, for her support and encouragement throughout the course.

## **Executive Summary**

Pittsburgh prides itself on being the “most livable city” in the United States, but this motto does not ring true for all Pittsburgh residents. More than half of Pittsburgh’s neighborhoods are “high poverty,” meaning that their poverty rate is between twenty and forty percent; or “concentrated poverty,” meaning that their poverty rate is forty percent or higher.<sup>1</sup> From 2010 to 2014, 69.6 percent of Pittsburgh’s urban poor lived in high poverty neighborhoods and 20.5 percent lived in concentrated poverty neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> Although changes in the technology, education, and healthcare industries have brought economic growth to the City, they also contribute to increasing property values and rising rents, both of which can force residents into neighborhoods of higher poverty. In this report, we present a policy recommendation addressing how the City can best leverage its stock of vacant land to bring necessary, inclusive benefits to areas of high and concentrated poverty. Pittsburgh is home to 27,000 vacant lots; 7,000 of these lots are owned by the City.<sup>3</sup> By addressing concentrated poverty through the development of vacant land, Pittsburgh’s City government and community leaders can deter the negative side effects of gentrification, especially displacement of low-income residents, while also promoting broader equitable development goals.

We researched Pittsburgh’s values to construct an ethical framework for why Pittsburgh’s policymakers should address concentrated poverty. Through this research, we concluded that City Council must address concentrated poverty because it contradicts three important values: Pittsburgh’s identity as the “most livable city” in the United States, Mayor Bill Peduto’s mantra that “if it’s not for everyone, it’s not for us,” and the City’s commitment to “inclusive innovation,” which has been its guiding philosophy on urban development since 2015.

Concentrated poverty contradicts these values in two key ways. First, concentrated poverty in Pittsburgh creates deep inequality along racial lines. Our research shows that poor black residents in Pittsburgh are almost twice as likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods and more than three times as likely to live in concentrated poverty compared to poor whites.<sup>4</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup> “Pgh Snap,” City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, October 2011, Accessed 08 December 2016, [http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/PGHSNAP\\_v2.02.pdf](http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/PGHSNAP_v2.02.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, “U.S. concentrated poverty in the wake of the Great Recession,” *The Brookings Institute*, 31 March 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Pittsburgh City Planning, “Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit,” 2015, Accessed 15 September 2016, [http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/VLTK\\_12-8-15.pdf](http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/VLTK_12-8-15.pdf).

further discovered that, as a result of this disparity, black Pittsburgh residents are dramatically less healthy and more likely to fall victim to crime, and have fewer economic opportunities and worse educational outcomes. In addition, black Pittsburgh residents are less likely than white residents to say that Pittsburgh and their neighborhood are good places to live.<sup>5</sup> Pittsburgh cannot accurately call itself “the most livable city” when so many of its residents experience a lower quality of life and consider their environments less livable according to factors like their race and neighborhood. Though Pittsburgh is experiencing economic growth through innovation and technology, neighborhoods experiencing high and concentrated poverty receive little of that windfall and, in fact, bear the negative consequences of gentrification, including displacement. Pittsburgh’s egalitarian values like “inclusive innovation” and policy that is for “everyone” require that the City seek out equitable means to ensure the whole city benefits from its economic resurgence.

Once we identified the ways Pittsburgh’s values motivate our research, we studied the effect of federal housing and development policies on the Rust Belt in order to to understand past successes and shortcomings of federal housing and development policies. Early federal policies around the time of the Great Depression instituted practices of redlining, understood as the systematic exclusion of home-ownership loans in poor and generally minority neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup> Since the U.S. Housing Act of 1949, federal policy attempted to correct for redlined neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup> Through policies such as the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 and 1977, HOPE VI, and Choice Neighborhoods, the federal government has encouraged and incentivized urban homeownership and rehabilitation. As a result, gentrification has emerged as a major issue for U.S. cities, with affluent and generally white homebuyers settling in newly redeveloped, low-income neighborhoods, often displacing low-income residents. These gentrifying neighborhoods are often in close proximity to impoverished neighborhoods that did not get the same federal investment. We draw upon our historical research to inform policies that create inclusive community growth.

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, “U.S. concentrated poverty in the wake of the Great Recession.”

<sup>5</sup> “Pittsburgh’s Racial Demographics 2015: Differences and Disparities,” *University of Pittsburgh Center on Race and Social Problems*, 2015, Accessed 01 October 2015, <http://www.crsp.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> William Julius Wilson, “The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 123, no. 4 (Winter 2008-09): 557.

<sup>7</sup> William Julius Wilson, “The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty,” 560.

Informed by extensive historical research, we identified two main causes of concentrated poverty: the inequitable funding of public schools and the lack of transportation for those living in areas of poverty. Because less than five percent of public school funding comes from the federal government,<sup>8</sup> these schools are primarily financed from local property taxes which do not contribute a meaningful amount of funds to improve their schools. As a result, these schools produce fewer graduates who will pursue higher education, thus limiting job opportunities for residents in high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods. The second major cause of concentrated poverty is the lack of adequate transportation. Residents of these neighborhoods lack both access to public transportation and personal cars, thus creating an additional challenge for job employment. These causes are particularly useful in analyzing how concentrated poverty develops. Our case studies proceed to draw on these causes in their efforts to address and mitigate concentrated poverty through policy options.

Using the shared historical trends and causes of post-industrial and Rust Belt cities, we researched two case studies: Portland, Oregon and Cleveland, Ohio. Both cities share key features with Pittsburgh, which allowed us to observe the impact of applied policies and glean possible policy ideas. We studied Portland, Oregon, because it has a similar affordable housing crisis to Pittsburgh and because it has an up-and-coming tech sector like Pittsburgh.<sup>9</sup> We studied Cleveland, Ohio because it shares Pittsburgh's history as a post-industrial city that has experienced depopulation, creating pockets of concentrated poverty.<sup>10</sup> In both cases, our research showed that the cities aggressively and pragmatically used vacant land to transform communities. Portland used vacant land to erect affordable housing,<sup>11</sup> while Cleveland acquired and cleaned vacant lots to improve local property values.<sup>12</sup> We concluded from our case studies that when cities address vacant land, they transform those spaces to help, rather than harm, the economy. Our case studies helped our group hone in on vacant lots as a practical way to address concentrated poverty through placemaking, which focuses on revitalizing areas by making them more appealing, affordable, and livable for current and new residents.

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<sup>8</sup> "How Do We Fund Our Schools?" *PBS*, 05 September 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Spencer, "Portland's tech talent growth outpaces Silicon Valley," *Bizjournal*, 13 August 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Michelle Jarboe, "Vacant Houses, Blighted Buildings Still Plague Cleveland, But Problem is Shrinking: Taking Stock," *Cleveland*, 21 November 2015.

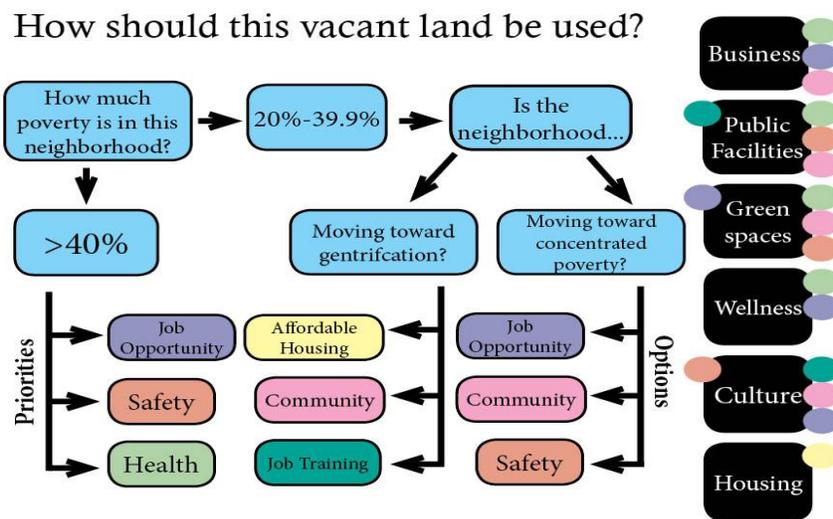
<sup>11</sup> Craig Beebee, "Portland's Housing Crisis: Four Charts to Ponder," *Oregon Metro News*, 28 January 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Cuyahoga Land Bank, "Welcome to the Cuyahoga Land Bank," Accessed 05 December 2016, <http://www.cuyahogalandbank.org/>.

Through our research, we concluded that the City should utilize vacant land for several reasons. First, because the city already owns a quarter of Pittsburgh’s vacant land, City officials can work with communities to encourage and expedite development that targets each community’s needs. Additionally, undeveloped vacant lots hurt the local economy by depressing property values, discouraging business investment, and increasing crime rates. Vacant land represents untapped potential, and city and community leaders should look to vacant parcels in neighborhoods of high and concentrated poverty as opportunities for creative, community-driven development. By doing so, Pittsburgh City Council can improve the quality of life in these neighborhoods while also creating space for economic development that benefits everyone.

Our research shows the best method for revitalizing these vacant lots is through placemaking. The placemaking paradigm focuses on revitalizing areas by making them more appealing, affordable, and livable for current and new residents. By implementing specific interventions, placemaking aims to bring more resources and capital to these areas. For example, placemaking interventions can include bringing new businesses, health clinics, and grocery stores to a neighborhood. By doing so, placemaking attempts to improve impoverished areas instead of relocating and displacing current residents. With a focus on placemaking, our policy aims to make existing communities healthier, stronger, and more equitable rather than driving new gentrification.

We recommend that city council adopts this placemaking decision tree that helps city and community leaders decide the best uses for vacant land in impoverished neighborhoods:



The first question of the decision tree requires a community member to assess the poverty level of their neighborhood. Since the impacts of concentrated poverty get worse as poverty level increases, all concentrated poverty neighborhoods rarely attract investment without government intervention. For this reason, concentrated poverty neighborhoods are not further distinguished, and the community member is directed to the three associated policy benefits: job opportunities, community, and safety. However, many high poverty neighborhoods are prime candidates for private investment. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish between neighborhoods that show signs of gentrification and those that show signs of decline. Although partly subjective, certain information such as housing price trends, business activity, and demographic shifts can indicate which high poverty neighborhoods are declining or moving toward gentrification.

We divided the neighborhoods in this way because our research showed that each of these neighborhood types has unique needs. We distilled the needs that we discovered into a list of six benefits that communities should seek to derive from developing vacant land. For our purposes, “benefits” are defined as features of a healthy and vibrant mixed-income neighborhood that can be promoted by city policy. These benefits are affordable housing, community, public health, job opportunities, job training, and safety. Although every neighborhood could be improved by all six of these benefits, we consulted our research to identify the three top priority benefits for each type of neighborhood, meaning the three benefits that each community most direly lacks.

For each of these benefits, our research suggests several options for how city and community leaders should seek to transform vacant land: promote business investment, build public facilities, create green spaces, advocate wellness spaces, encourage cultural spaces, or develop affordable housing. Importantly, this decision tree is not intended to be a list of ways that the city should go about spending its own resources to develop vacant land. Instead, it helps communities identify the best uses for vacant land as they seek out public, private, and nonprofit partnerships and resources to help develop it.

Concentrated poverty neighborhoods experience little development and mortgage loan investment. Property values are low, crime rates and unemployment rates are high, and vacant land and unoccupied structures abound. Residents experience a “double burden” of poverty; not only do they struggle individually, but their community lacks the resources to offer social

support. Many policymakers consider concentrated poverty neighborhoods beyond help, but community leaders should look toward abundant vacant land for development opportunities. For neighborhoods in concentrated poverty, our research shows that the three most pertinent benefits to pursue by developing vacant land are job opportunities, safety, and public health.

Pittsburgh neighborhoods that fit into the category of high poverty are often very different, and they therefore have different needs. Some, like Friendship and East Liberty, are gentrifying, while others, such as Larimer, are in decline and on their way to concentrated poverty. Neighborhoods that are gentrifying experience rising prices and an influx of new residents. These neighborhoods do not struggle to attract business investment, but existing residents don't share in the economic windfalls or job opportunities. Instead, they bear the costs of rising rents and property taxes, and may be displaced into poorer neighborhoods. For high poverty neighborhoods that are gentrifying, our research shows that the three most pertinent benefits to create by developing vacant land are affordable housing, community, and job training.

Meanwhile, high poverty neighborhoods that are in decline share similar characteristics with concentrated poverty neighborhoods, though residents generally experience a better quality of life on metrics like health outcomes. These neighborhoods decline as population decreases and businesses shutter. Those who remain have fewer job opportunities and fear rising crime rates. Neighborhoods in decline can face a slippery slope; with each shuttered business, the neighborhood struggles a little more to support the businesses that remain. This is why it is essential for city and community leaders to take action through vacant land. By spurring investment in these neighborhoods now, communities can avoid becoming Pittsburgh's next concentrated poverty neighborhood. For high poverty neighborhoods in decline, our research shows that the three most pertinent benefits to create by developing vacant land are job opportunity, community, and safety.

Our decision tree reflects the extremely complex nature of poverty and the diverse needs of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. Ultimately, no one knows a community's needs better than its residents. Therefore, it is crucial that community members set the vision and direction for developing vacant land in their neighborhoods. This decision tree gives residents, city planners, and community leaders the evidence-based research they need to inform decisions about vacant land use, empowering communities to seek solutions, rather than dictating the solutions to them. While there is no one clear solution to concentrated poverty, our hope is that this decision tree

will enable city and community leaders to more efficiently evaluate their options to improve impoverished neighborhoods.

Finally, we conclude our report with a discussion of limits to our policy recommendation as well as topics that require further study. Unfortunately, time constraints, limited data, and many different perspectives on development among experts, policymakers, and people impacted our ability to fully explore every avenue of study. In addition, we recognize that issues such as gentrification and concentrated poverty are vast and impossible to address with one policy recommendation. Therefore, we encourage further research on funding strategies, the impacts of current redevelopment projects, and encouraging community engagement. Further research and action in these areas will ensure that Pittsburgh truly earns its title as “the most livable city” in America.

## **Introduction**

This report presents a policy recommendation that strives to address issues of concentrated poverty in Pittsburgh by informing community decision-making with respect to development of vacant lots. Our initial focus was gentrification in Pittsburgh and the displacement of low-income city residents. Gentrification in Pittsburgh is a growing topic of concern given recent increases in the concentration of wealthy younger residents due to growth in Pittsburgh's education and technology industries. These emerging industries have created challenges of affordability, displacement, and socioeconomic inequality that we sought to address.

However, gentrification is just one aspect of a broader problem of ensuring equitable development within Pittsburgh. This is especially important given Pittsburgh's focus on being a city for all, as evidenced by Mayor Peduto's slogan, "If it's not for everyone, it's not for us"<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, these ideals have not been reflected in Pittsburgh's recent development trends. Besides those residents who have been displaced in areas like Lawrenceville, East Liberty and the North Shore due to gentrification and revitalization efforts, residents in many low-income areas have not received any benefits from Pittsburgh's new economic growth.

Our policy aims to create the best practices for developing the large amounts of vacant lots that are currently owned by the city of Pittsburgh as a means of bringing different kinds of benefits to residents across the city. Vacant lots are an affordable and practical way to improve issues of equitable development. Currently, there are 27,000 vacant lots in the City of Pittsburgh. Of these, the city owns nearly 7,300 vacant lots, which make up nineteen percent of the total area of vacant land within the City. Maintaining a single lot can cost the City nearly \$600 per year, with estimated annual total costs between \$3-4 million<sup>14</sup>. By utilizing vacant lots, the City can reduce its own maintenance costs while also benefitting its residents.

Underlying our recommendation is the paradigm of placemaking. The placemaking paradigm focuses on revitalizing areas by making them more appealing, affordable, and livable for current and new residents. By implementing specific interventions, placemaking aims to

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<sup>13</sup> Bill Peduto, "Smart PGH: If it's not for all, it's not for us," United States Department of Transportation.

<sup>14</sup> Pittsburgh City Planning, "Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit," 2015, 4, Accessed 15 September 2016, [http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/VLTK\\_12-8-15.pdf](http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/VLTK_12-8-15.pdf).

bring more resources and capital to these areas. For example, placemaking interventions can include bringing new businesses, health clinics, and grocery stores to a neighborhood. By doing so, placemaking attempts to improve impoverished areas instead of relocating and displacing current residents. By focusing on placemaking, our policy aims to make existing communities healthier, stronger, and more equitable rather than driving new gentrification.

Our placemaking approach provides recommendations for areas of high poverty and areas of concentrated poverty. High poverty neighborhoods are defined as those in which twenty to forty percent of the population lives below the federal poverty line. Concentrated poverty neighborhoods are defined as those in which forty percent and above of the population lives below the federal poverty line. Areas of concentrated poverty are characterized by the sharpest decline and are therefore those in most need of help. Our report discusses at length the impacts concentrated poverty has on the short and long-term health of communities. Areas of high poverty have the potential to slip into areas of concentrated poverty, but are simultaneously also those most at risk of gentrification. Through placemaking in high poverty areas, we aim to both prevent neighborhoods from slipping further into poverty and from being revitalized at a pace that displaces current residents. We further organized our placemaking policy by tailoring recommendations according to specific needs that communities might choose to address. As our methodology section will explain, the use of specific benefits with community choice as an integral part of our policy serves to improve on the failures of past developmental and affordable housing policies.

Ultimately, we present a decision tree for community leaders and city officials to utilize in areas of high and concentrated poverty in Pittsburgh. The mechanics of this tree are more fully explained below. We believe that our policy recommendation can address the issue of equitable development by placemaking with vacant lots in areas of concentrated and high poverty in order to bolster and create more equitable, diverse communities.

## **Terminology**

**Area median income (AMI):** The value that divides the distribution of income into two parts—either above AMI or below AMI. This is calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to determine eligibility for federal housing programs and benefits.

**City planning:** A plan for the development, construction, and improvement of a city; usually this responsibility falls under the supervision of city planners, city governments, and developers.

**Concentrated poverty:** A classification whereby more than forty percent of the designated area lives below the federal poverty line.

**Cycle of poverty:** The phenomenon whereby poor children and families become trapped in poverty and fail to improve their socio-economic status for generations.

**Double burden:** The combined strain of being low-income and living in neighborhoods of high or concentrated poverty. These people experience greater disadvantage than low-income residents of mixed-income neighborhoods.

**Federal poverty level:** A measurement of income determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services each year, which varies due to household size. It also determines eligibility for programs and benefits such as healthcare savings and Medicaid. The 2016 federal poverty level is: \$11,880 for individuals, \$16,020 for a family of two, \$20,160 for a family of three, \$24,300 for a family of four, \$28,440 for a family of five, \$32,580 for a family of six, \$36,730 for a family of seven, and \$40,890 for a family of eight.<sup>15</sup>

**Food desert:** An area, usually located in urban areas, where food is not accessible, affordable, or of healthy quality.

**Gentrification:** The renovation and improvement of deteriorating neighborhoods, whereby more affluent individuals move in, which leads to property value increases in these usually urban neighborhoods. As a result, low-income residents are often displaced because they cannot sustain increased rent and property value taxes.

**High poverty:** A classification whereby more than twenty percent but less than forty percent of the designated area lives below the federal poverty line.

**Income limits:** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) establishes these values yearly, which are determined by family size.<sup>16</sup> The categories include “extremely

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<sup>15</sup> “Federal Poverty Level,” *Healthcare.gov*, <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-FPL/>, Accessed 01 December 2016.

low income” (thirty percent of area median income), “very low income” (fifty percent of area median income), and “low-income” (eighty percent of area median income).

**Land banks:** Governmental or quasi-governmental entities that acquire, stabilize, maintain, and repurpose parcels of vacant and abandoned land with the intention of making once blighted land serve a productive purpose.

**Mixed-income housing:** A housing development or neighborhood that includes a range of housing structures—apartment complexes, single or multiple family homes, townhouses, etc.—to accommodate residents at varying income levels. This strategy is used within some apartment complexes that contain affordable units and market-rate units.

**Placemaking paradigm:** A city planning and development philosophy which prioritizes the holistic creation of sustainable communities. When developers aim to create places, shaped by time and history, rather than mere public spaces or affordable housing units, the result is a healthier, happier, and more vibrant community.

**Public housing agency (PHA):** Local entities who control the local public housing units of a city or town. In Pittsburgh, the PHA is the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh. This is the agency that interacts with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regarding Section 8 Vouchers, among other programs.

**Urban development:** The physical, economic, cultural, and social changes of cities, including the reasons and causes for the development; often the improvement of an urban area or city.

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):** The federal agency tasked to oversee “home ownership, low-income housing assistance, fair housing laws, homelessness, aid for distressed neighborhoods, and housing development plans.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “Income Limits,” Accessed 01 December 2016, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il.html>.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “About HUD,” Accessed 01 December 2016, <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>.

## **Methodology**

After a thorough review of existing scholarship regarding housing, gentrification, and equitable development, our group decided to focus our attention on concentrated poverty as a core area of concern. In order to address the issue of concentrated poverty, we sought to answer several specific questions. These questions were (1) What are the causes of concentrated poverty and how does it impact communities?; (2) How did past policies fail or succeed in addressing this issue?; (3) How does concentrated poverty manifest itself in Pittsburgh? Ultimately, our goal was to create a policy that addresses challenges of concentrated poverty and promotes equitable development while also improving on past policy failures.

Given our focus on concentrated poverty, our overall approach drew on a combination of scholarly research, the evaluation of case studies, and interviews with key stakeholders and experts in the city to gain the best understanding we could in a limited timeframe. This research was conducted by a team of eight over the course of several months from September to December 2016.

In order to address the causes and impacts of concentrated poverty, and how previous policies addressed these issues, we utilized scholarly research from a wide variety of sources and institutions. Some of these sources included studies from the Urban Land Institute, Brookings Institution, news sources, legal cases, and various research articles on how concentrated poverty is created and self-propagates. For example, we researched national policies pertaining to low-income neighborhoods, how factors like race influenced such policies, poverty trends of the Rust Belt, and how Pittsburgh fared through those trends. This analysis revealed that many neighborhoods have been neglected from the resources necessary for community growth. Many residents of neighborhoods that do receive assistance become displaced from their communities. As a whole, failed policies focused heavily on economic aspects of social mobility, while ignoring other components of a community's wellbeing. Of particular value was using the case studies of other cities that faced similar issues of concentrated poverty. Two cities included in this report are Portland and Cleveland. These cities were chosen because of their similarity to Pittsburgh along dimensions that present its unique challenges. Portland was chosen due to its recent growth as a hub for tech-industries, declining affordability, and affordable housing shortages. Cleveland was chosen due to its position as a once-thriving American Rust Belt city

with population changes and affordable housing challenges. Data from these cities provided valuable insights about the challenges concentrated poverty presents for equitable development, specifically that Pittsburgh must capitalize on its unique features to address challenges of equitable development.

To learn more about concentrated poverty in Pittsburgh, our group interviewed key stakeholders and experts in the city and began our research with past city studies on the issues of equitable development. The city's Affordable Housing Task Force report was an invaluable starting point. It provided an overview of the issues of affordable housing in Pittsburgh, issues that are intrinsically connected to concentrated poverty, and potential recommendations for future policymakers. We built upon these ideas by contacting several stakeholders and experts to learn more about concentrated poverty specifically within Pittsburgh. These individuals discussed how concentrated poverty manifests itself uniquely in Pittsburgh.

Our ultimate focus was greatly influenced by our conversations with Councilman Burgess, who stressed that vacancies were one of Pittsburgh's largest challenges but also a significant resource. Currently, there are nearly 7,300 vacant lots owned by the city that make up nineteen percent of the total area of vacant land within the city, and cost the city between \$3-4 million annually to maintain<sup>18</sup>. Redeveloping vacant lots can cut down unnecessary costs for the City. Additionally, vacant lots also give developers the ability to create opportunities and benefits for communities in concentrated poverty, and could bring new life to an impoverished area. These investments can help these communities, rather than a select few gentrifying areas, to achieve equitable development goals. We soon decided that vacant lots would be our tool for improving areas of concentrated poverty. After attending the P4 Conference in October, we learned another common flaw of past policies. Through conversations with a variety of community leaders, including developers, landlords, residents, and students, one central theme arose: a policy addressing issues of concentrated poverty and equitable development must not only be community-specific, but also engage the community as a whole. Many policies focused on specific areas, but lacked community support, knowledge, and guidance for developing these areas. As a result, they often led to benefits being dispersed onto others, not those that the policy originally sought to help. In order to successfully achieve equitable development goals, residents ought to have the tools and resources to improve their own communities.

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<sup>18</sup> Pittsburgh City Planning, "Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit."

As a whole, we learned that past policies failed because they did not address four criteria to effectively deter concentrated poverty: (1) Accounting for non-economic factors; (2) Building and strengthening existing communities; (3) Promoting the future betterment of targeted areas; and (4) Giving communities a voice in their development. In order to address these four criteria, we crafted policy recommendations to benefit communities on several socioeconomic dimensions. This range of benefits includes job trainings and opportunities, affordable housing, safety, health, and strengthening communities. A policy that could provide these benefits would improve on the failures of past policies. In order to provide these benefits across these dimensions we focused on a method of placemaking, which revitalizes areas by making them more appealing, affordable, and livable for current and new residents through specific interventions. These interventions bring new resources into areas like grocery stores, clinics, affordable housing, and more. By doing so, placemaking seeks to improve impoverished areas, rather than relocating and dispersing current residents into wealthier areas. We decided to focus on placemaking because it addressed our four criteria more comprehensively than previous social mobility policies. Whereas social mobility seeks to improve economic measures within an area, placemaking focuses on the entire wellbeing of a community. Placemaking also allows specific interventions based on the seven benefits listed above. This focus of placemaking aligned with our own research, ethical considerations, and the goal of equitable development.

## **Ethical Considerations**

City Council, Pittsburgh City Government, and other Pittsburgh stakeholders have an ethical obligation to address concentrated poverty because poverty in Pittsburgh contradicts several values that the city actively cultivates. Pittsburgh residents experience a very different city based on their race and where they live. Such inequality undermines aspects of the city that it seeks to promote, such as its livability, its egalitarianism, and its ideology of “inclusive innovation.”<sup>19</sup> Pittsburgh City Council should look to the use of vacant land to address these challenges and help Pittsburgh live up to its own values.

Pittsburgh proudly promotes itself as the “most livable city” in the United States, a title that many travel magazines and news outlets have awarded the city since the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> But not every Pittsburgh resident experiences a city that is very livable. Disproportionately, those who experience a less than livable Pittsburgh are minorities who reside in the city’s pockets of high and concentrated poverty. In 2012, thirty-one percent of African American Pittsburgh residents lived in poverty compared to just ten percent of white residents. Overall, eighty percent of impoverished people in the Pittsburgh region are African American.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, poor African Americans are more likely than poor whites to live in poor neighborhoods. In Pittsburgh, poor African Americans are twice as likely to live in high poverty and three times as likely to live in concentrated poverty than poor whites.<sup>22</sup>

Such a racial disparity in wealth has made Pittsburgh dramatically less livable for people of color across a host of criteria. First, black Pittsburgh residents experience drastically worse health outcomes. Pittsburgh’s infant mortality rate is twice as high for black residents than whites (12.4 versus 6.4 deaths per 1,000 births).<sup>23</sup> Teen pregnancy in Allegheny county is dramatically higher among black girls aged fifteen to seventeen than white girls (34.1 versus 5.3 per 1,000).<sup>24</sup> The rate of HIV infection is nearly five times as high for blacks as for whites (35.9

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<sup>19</sup> Urban Redevelopment Authority, “Pittsburgh Roadmap for Inclusive Innovation,” 2015.

<sup>20</sup> “Pittsburgh Ranked Number One City to Live in Northeast by Money Magazine,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 18 August 2015

<sup>21</sup> Carol DeVita and Maura Ferrell, “Poverty and Income Insecurity in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area,” *The Urban Institute* (November 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, “U.S. concentrated poverty in the wake of the Great Recession.”

<sup>23</sup> “Pittsburgh’s Racial Demographics 2015: Differences and Disparities.”

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

versus 7.4 per 100,000).<sup>25</sup> Promoting healthy outcomes for residents is an essential task of any city that wishes to call itself livable, let alone “most livable.”

Black Pittsburgh residents also experience a lower quality of life, in terms of both crime and their own perceptions of their neighborhoods. In 2012, the rate of juvenile murder victims was thirty-two per 100,000 black Pittsburgh youth, and zero per 100,000 for whites.<sup>26</sup> For adults, the rate was 70.4 per 100,000 black Pittsburgh residents and 4.5 for whites.<sup>27</sup> Understandably, living in violent neighborhoods makes black Pittsburgh residents feel uncertain about their safety. Twenty-four percent of black Pittsburgh residents think their neighborhood is becoming more violent, compared to just 12.7 percent of whites.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, forty-six percent of black residents think the police do just a fair or poor job of protecting the community, while less than thirty percent of non-blacks say the same.<sup>29</sup> While nearly eighty percent of non-black citizens of Pittsburgh believe that their neighborhood is a good, very good, or excellent place to live, just 56.7 percent of black residents agree.<sup>30</sup> Pittsburgh cannot truly call itself “the most livable city,” as long as so many of its black residents feel unsafe and think that their communities do not serve their needs.

Since Pittsburgh’s high poverty and concentrated poverty neighborhoods are disproportionately black, black people in Pittsburgh score far worse on economic metrics than white residents. The median income of a white household in Pittsburgh is \$44,600, twice that of a black household (\$21,800).<sup>31</sup> Between 2007 and 2011, the average unemployment rate for black Pittsburgh citizens was 16.6 percent, nearly three times the rate for whites (6.7 percent).<sup>32</sup> While nearly sixty percent of whites in Pittsburgh own their home, the same is true of just thirty-four percent of blacks.<sup>33</sup>

These economic disparities are due in no small part to divergent educational achievement among Pittsburgh’s white and black residents. By fourth grade, 72.1 percent of white students in Pittsburgh public schools are proficient in reading, compared to just 44.6 percent of black

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<sup>25</sup> “Pittsburgh’s Racial Demographics 2015: Differences and Disparities,” 53.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

students.<sup>34</sup> This gap widens by the time students graduate from high school; 75.8 percent of white students in eleventh grade are proficient in reading, compared to just 41.4 percent of black students.<sup>35</sup> The disparity is even more extreme for math, in which 63.2 percent of white Pittsburgh eleventh graders and just 27.2 percent of black eleventh graders are proficient.<sup>36</sup> Because of these differences, twenty percent fewer black students graduate high school than their white peers, and white adults in Pittsburgh are twice as likely to have a college degree as blacks.<sup>37</sup> Pittsburgh cannot be a livable city without exceptional educational outcomes, particularly because the emerging Pittsburgh economy is built around highly skilled industries like technology that require a well-educated workforce.

It is every local government's responsibility to educate its residents and ensure their health, safety, and economic security. One would expect "the most livable city" in the United States to excel in each of these metrics. While the quality of life for most Pittsburgh residents is fairly high, Pittsburgh's black residents experience, on average, a much less livable city than whites. This is due, in large part, to the fact that African Americans in Pittsburgh are more likely to live in poverty than whites, and poor African Americans are more likely to live in Pittsburgh's high poverty and concentrated poverty neighborhoods than poor whites. Until Pittsburgh is a livable city for all by addressing concentrated poverty, it cannot fairly be said to be a livable city at all.

Mayor Peduto's mantra is "If it's not for everyone, it's not for us."<sup>38</sup> This value is completely undermined by the extreme inequalities laid out above. Because Pittsburgh harbors highly segregated neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, arbitrary factors like a resident's race and where she is born have large impacts on the quality of her life. This is not in the spirit of Mayor Peduto's egalitarian mantra.

Because Pittsburgh strives to be an inclusive, equitable city, its government must ensure that new economic gains go to everyone, and, in particular, these gains help alleviate the city's current inequality. Pittsburgh is fortunate to be a center of growth and development with exciting new jobs and opportunities. While Pittsburgh is now known for technical innovation, the city's leaders have professed also that they are committed to making that innovation "inclusive." In

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<sup>34</sup> "Pittsburgh's Racial Demographics 2015: Differences and Disparities," 24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 27, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Bill Peduto, "Smart PGH: If it's not for all, it's not for us," United States Department of Transportation.

2015, the City published a document called the “Pittsburgh Roadmap for Inclusive Innovation.” In this document, Mayor Peduto asserts, “It is our goal to lay out a vision for not only what the City's government can and will achieve, but to ensure that we provide these same opportunities to each of our residents through inclusive innovation.”<sup>39</sup> While this is a commendable sentiment, the roadmap itself doesn't directly address the challenges of concentrated poverty, nor does it say much about the unfair distribution of new high-paying opportunities in the city. The city must work so that all Pittsburgh residents benefit from these windfalls, which can only occur by tackling concentrated poverty.

With this in mind, our group identified vacant land as both a hallmark of concentrated poverty as well as an opportunity for the city to promote its egalitarian, inclusive vision of growth. There are 27,000 parcels of vacant land in Pittsburgh, 7,200 of which are owned by the city.<sup>40</sup> The city should look to vacant parcels in neighborhoods of high or concentrated poverty as opportunities for creative, community-driven development. Vacant land represents untapped potential. Moreover, vacant land is an opportunity for City Council to ensure that Pittsburgh's economic growth is distributed to all residents fairly. By helping communities decide how to use their vacant land, Pittsburgh City Council can help those communities mitigate many of the causes and impacts of concentrated poverty and overcome the structural and environmental obstacles that hold them back. If Pittsburgh wants to be a most livable city for all of its residents, it must actively and strategically make use of its vast holding of vacant land.

Our policy, a decision tree for how impoverished communities should use vacant land, embodies Pittsburgh's values as a city for all. It focuses on the needs of each community as individual units of the city, but it also aims to make Pittsburgh more equitable overall. In addition, it focuses on all aspects of a community's wellbeing, not just their economic needs. Therefore, it provides a holistic plan for development that targets benefits to the groups in Pittsburgh that need them most.

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<sup>39</sup> Urban Redevelopment Authority, “Pittsburgh Roadmap for Inclusive Innovation,” 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Pittsburgh City Planning, “Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit.”

## **Historical Background**

### **Federal Housing and Development Policies in the Rust Belt**

Current problems of concentrated poverty originate from the Great Depression, when poverty and poor living standards first necessitated large-scale, comprehensive federal policy on housing and development. The federal government enabled and promoted economic and racial housing segregation through redlining policies. The government systematically ignored developmental investment and homeownership loan assistance in certain neighborhoods, forging concentrations of poverty. The negative byproducts of redlining necessitated that policy grapple with economic and racial housing segregation during subsequent decades of deindustrialization, industrial transition, and the foreclosure crisis of the 2000s. The Rust Belt, of which Pittsburgh is an integral unit, faced particular challenges due to the vast amounts of deindustrialization, vacancy, and abandonment that it experienced in the post-World War II era. Largely due to this region's post-industrial labor transition, the Rust Belt has historically struggled the most with concentrated poverty and associated vacancy concerns. To this day, federal policy insufficiently guards against the formation of concentrated poverty neighborhoods through continued utilization of the foundationally segregative principles of redlining, inadequate corrective policy, and a lack of enforcement of existing policy. Moreover, there is a lack of provisions to ensure local residents will be included when policy actually does improve a neighborhood. In order to understand ways to improve areas in Pittsburgh afflicted by poverty, the history of these trends must first be understood.

### *Redlining*

Perhaps the most important historical cause of concentrated poverty was redlining, the process of ruling out certain neighborhoods for mortgage investment on the basis of risk, often stratified by the neighborhood's racial composition.<sup>41</sup> Starting around 1910, the Great Migration of blacks from the South and a large blue-collar immigrant population filled Northern industrial cities throughout the Rust Belt.<sup>42</sup> Early federal housing policy, like the Home Owner's Loan

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<sup>41</sup> William Julius Wilson, "The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty," *Political Science Quarterly*, 123, no. 4 (Winter 2008-09): 557.

<sup>42</sup> Michael H. Schill and Susan M. Wachter, "The Spatial Bias of Federal Housing Law and Policy: Concentrated Poverty in Urban America," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 143, no. 5 (May 1995): 1308.

Corporation of 1933 (HOLC), the U.S. Housing Act of 1934, and the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, used home ownership and improvement mortgage loan capital to incentivize middle and upper class Americans from settling away from city centers and minority populations and towards white suburbs.

With race as a major factor, the HOLC created a system that ranked neighborhoods in four categories from most desirable to least desirable in order to determine whether an individual neighborhood was a good target for investment. These assessments occurred irrespective of whether the individual seeking a loan was a good candidate or not.<sup>43</sup> Over half of Detroit and one-third of Chicago was redlined by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), a federal agency established under the U.S. Housing Act of 1934. The FHA warned against making loans to areas with “inharmonious racial groups,” promoting racially segregated neighborhoods.<sup>44</sup> Even in areas that were not redlined, the perceived risk status of neighborhoods, largely determined by racial composition, drastically impacted the amount the government would invest in insurance for their home loans. In St. Louis, for example, insured mortgage loans to the suburbs were five times larger than those given to the inner-city, which pushed home-buyers away from the city.<sup>45</sup>

The U.S Housing Act of 1937 exacerbated the problems of economic and racial segregation by assigning and subsidizing nearly autonomous control to local authorities who could create unique racially restrictive zoning ordinances, create their own admissions and evictions standards, and decide whether or not to allow public housing to be built in the municipality.<sup>46</sup> Pittsburgh was one of the first cities in the nation to react to the new federal legislation, proving itself a leader of urban planning. In response to the U.S Housing Act of 1937, Pittsburgh City Council established its local public housing agency, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP), on August 26, 1937.<sup>47</sup> The HACP is tasked with providing decent and affordable housing for low-income residents.<sup>48</sup>

The first federal public housing units in the mid-1930s illustrate how federal housing policies prioritized protecting affluent, white neighborhoods from racial integration over

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<sup>43</sup> Schill, 1309.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1310.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1311.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1292.

<sup>47</sup> The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, “About,” *Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh*, <http://www.hacp.org/about>.

<sup>48</sup> Today, HACP is responsible for about 4,000 public housing units and oversight of an additional 900 mixed-income housing units.

economic integration. Unlike later public housing, these early developments occurred in neighborhoods across the entirety of the socioeconomic spectrum, not just the lowest-income neighborhoods.<sup>49</sup> While this arguably altered the socioeconomic composition of some areas, early public housing provisions stated that public developments should not alter the racial composition of neighborhoods. This meant that poor blacks remained in black, generally poor neighborhoods while poor whites generally relocated to neighborhoods of a higher socioeconomic status.<sup>50</sup> Early public housing informs the discussion of redlining by showing that wealthy neighborhoods were more concerned with racial integration than economic integration.

### *Transitioning Economies*

The U.S. Housing Act of 1949 was the federal government's first attempt to address neighborhood problems that stemmed from redlining. It included new goals for decent living environments after the war, funded the clearance of slums and urban renewal projects, and established national public housing programs.<sup>51</sup> The Housing Act of 1949 lowered income restrictions on public housing residents to a level that was not changed until the 1980s.<sup>52</sup> In all, the new law displaced 600,000 people, packed them into dense new developments, and evicted the wealthier among them.<sup>53</sup> In Pittsburgh, this effect emerged in the Lower Hill District. Critically, this policy coincided with the Second Great Migration, compounding its negative effects in Midwestern and Northeastern cities.<sup>54</sup>

Suburban life was glamorized in stark contrast to city-life's association with densely packed, poor, and deteriorating neighborhoods. Veteran mortgage loans, the Federal Highway Act of 1956, mortgage interest tax exemptions that allowed for quick and cheap Levittown-style housing, and a handful of other factors continued to drive capital away from the city.<sup>55</sup> Eventually, suburbs had sufficient tax bases to separate their public services from the city, leaving a poor tax base from which urban centers could draw revenue.<sup>56</sup> The problem became a key political issue by the 1960s.

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<sup>49</sup> Neil Kraus, "Local policymaking and concentrated poverty: the case of Buffalo, New York," *Cities* 21, no. 6 (December 2004): 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> William Julius Wilson, "The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty," 560.

<sup>52</sup> Michael H. Schill and Susan M. Wachter, 1294.

<sup>53</sup> William Julius Wilson, "The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty," 560.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 561.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 557.

<sup>56</sup> William Julius Wilson, "The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty," 559.

Simultaneously, early signs of deindustrialization were beginning to manifest in the Rust Belt. Enabled by an efficient global market and post-World War II trade deals, American industries moved overseas to countries with lower costs of production and more favorable tax provisions. The 1960 census showed Rust Belt cities' populations decrease for the first census period in decades—Detroit's population decreased by 280,000, Milwaukee's by 130,000, St. Louis's by just over 100,000, and Pittsburgh's by over 70,000.<sup>57</sup>

The spreading and worsening condition of urban poverty inspired President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 established rent subsidies and other incentives to motivate private housing developers to create public housing for low-income Americans.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Johnson established the Cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).<sup>59</sup> However, the most obvious attempts to undo the harm created by federal redlining policies in the 1960s were Section 235 of the Homeownership Assistance Program of 1968 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Section 235 helped qualified low-income homebuyers secure down payments as low as \$200, provided mortgage insurance, and subsidized interest rates on mortgage loans as low as one percent per year.<sup>60</sup> From 1969 to 1979, half a million homes were purchased through Section 235, although the program had its problems.<sup>61</sup> In many Rust Belt cities like Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis, the loan-to-value ratio, fraudulent practices by realtors, blockbusting,<sup>62</sup> and poor administration by HUD caused divestment rather than investment.<sup>63</sup> Small down payments enabled consumers to pay inflated prices for buildings with structural flaws often overlooked by federal housing agencies, who local realtors frequently bribed. When the homeowner learned that the repairs were greater than the outstanding mortgage balances, many of the homes were abandoned. Almost one-fifth of the half-million homes subsidized by Section 235 were foreclosed on by 1979, causing the first major wave of national vacancy.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Alan Mallach, "Facing the Urban Challenge the Federal Government and America's Older Distressed Cities," May 2010, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0518\\_shrinking\\_cities\\_mallach.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0518_shrinking_cities_mallach.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> LBJ Presidential Library, "Media Kit Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)," <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/mediakits/hud/>.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Michael H. Schill and Susan M. Wachter, 1312.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 1313.

<sup>62</sup> Blockbusting involves real estate brokers assisting minority or ethnic individuals in buying homes in predominantly white neighborhoods. The real estate broker then uses this information in scare tactics to promote neighboring residents to sell their home. Through blockbusting the racial composition of a neighborhood can change rapidly.

<sup>63</sup> Michael H. Schill and Susan M. Wachter, 1312.

President Johnson passed the Fair Housing Act (FHA), otherwise known as Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, to end discrimination by home-sellers, landlords, real-estate agents, and home mortgage loan financiers against prospective buyers on the basis of the race, color, national origin, gender, or religion.<sup>65</sup> However, enforcement capabilities were limited. HUD lacked the ability to hold hearings and issue complaints or cease and desist orders. The fine for violating the FHA of 1968 was only \$1,000.<sup>66</sup> As a result, neither the economic nor racial aspects of redlining were fully addressed. By 1970, four million Americans lived in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty—a number that would double over the two subsequent decades.<sup>67</sup>

Largely a result of the transitioning economies, 22.5 percent of Midwesterners and seventeen percent of Northeasterners lived in poverty by 1969.<sup>68</sup> In the 1970s, the number of people living in areas of concentrated poverty rose to almost thirty percent, largely due to the industry shift from manufacturing to service and retail.<sup>69</sup> An estimated thirty-two to thirty-eight million jobs were lost in the manufacturing sector—about half of which occurred in the Rust Belt.<sup>70</sup> The overall increase of national concentrated poverty resulted from increases in metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>71</sup> During the 1970s, Dayton, Ohio lost forty-six percent of its manufacturing jobs and Detroit lost forty percent. Cities adjusted by transitioning into service and retail oriented economies.<sup>72</sup> The service sector provided eighty-six percent of all job growth during the decade, representing a transitioning Rust Belt economy.<sup>73</sup> The transitioning economy particularly hurt minorities, especially black males. Many people sought jobs in other regions of the country, leaving those with less money and low residential mobility behind. In the 1970s, St. Louis lost twenty-seven percent of its population, Buffalo lost twenty-three percent, and Detroit and Pittsburgh both lost nineteen percent.<sup>74</sup> Depopulation, combined with Section

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<sup>64</sup> Michael H. Schill and Susan M. Wachter, 1312.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1330.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1331.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Carey Nadeau, and Alan Berube, “The Re-Emergence of Concentrated Poverty: Metropolitan Trends in the 2000s,” *Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution* (November 2011), 5.

<sup>68</sup> Drew Desilver, “Who’s Poor in America? 50 Years into the ‘War on Poverty,’ a Data Portrait,” *The PEW Research Center*, 13 January 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Schill, 1286.

<sup>70</sup> John B. Strait, “The Disparate Impact of Metropolitan Economic Change: The Growth of Extreme Poverty Neighborhoods, 1970-1990,” *Economic Geography* 77, no. 3 (July 2001): 274.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Mallach, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Strait, 279.

<sup>74</sup> University of Wisconsin, “Chapter 1: Population Trends.”  
<https://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/milwecon/chap1.cfm>.

235's shortcomings, caused rampant vacancy and abandonment throughout the Rust Belt. As a result, concentrated poverty increased by 29.5 percent during the 1970s.<sup>75</sup>

During the 1970s, the federal government directed several inventive policy initiatives to address the housing and neighborhood needs of individuals living in low-income, blighted neighborhoods. As will be shown, the policies have left some neighborhoods stranded and have catalyzed gentrification and the back-to-the-city movement in others. The Housing and Community Development Act (HCDA) of 1974 provided two important systematic patches that are still integral to modern federal housing policy: the Section 8 Housing Program, which still utilizes the residential mobility option for addressing concentrated poverty, and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), which utilize placemaking. Section 8 furthers the initiative of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 by looking towards the private market to help with providing housing for low-income residents.

In the Section 8 program, HUD grants project-based and tenant-based vouchers to local public housing agencies—in Pittsburgh's case the HACP—which directly pays landlords with these vouchers; tenants are responsible for paying any remaining balance. Project-based vouchers are valid at specific housing complexes, whereas tenant-based vouchers are valid in the private market. With tenant-based vouchers, thirty percent of the voucher-holder's income applies to rent a fair-market priced unit, while the government subsidizes the rest, thus increasing the voucher holder's residential mobility.<sup>76</sup> But in reality, HUD generally underestimates fair market rent, landlords can avoid voucher-holding tenants, and many municipalities try to pass ordinances restricting Section 8 access. Although it has helped millions, Section 8 fails to achieve true residential mobility for voucher-holders and does little to improve impoverished neighborhoods.<sup>77</sup>

The HCDA of 1974 also established Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), used for targeted placemaking plans to address poverty and blight in struggling cities. Cities could apply for grants by submitting plans with clear development goals. CDBGs offer highly targeted development funding in order to bring capital back to previously neglected areas of the city. Since 1974, CDBGs have invested \$144 billion into neighborhoods, many previously

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<sup>75</sup> Schill, 1286.

<sup>76</sup> Altoona Housing Authority, "Section 8 Home Choice Voucher Program," <http://www.altoonahousing.org/sec8vs.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Schill, 1335.

neglected by redlining policies.<sup>78</sup> With \$3.1 billion invested through the highly competitive program in 2014, CDBGs continue to be a major tool for neighborhood revitalization .<sup>79</sup>

The HCDA of 1977, another important piece of legislation during this time period, worked to eliminate redlining in a more aggressive way than any previous legislation, including the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The HCDA of 1977 developed criteria to assess financial institutions for legal violations regarding “safe and sound” investment practices with the intention of addressing the disparately low credit opportunities in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>80</sup> However, the HCDA of 1977 was rarely enforced until the Clinton Administration. In 1990, 14.4 percent of home mortgage loan applications from white households were rejected, 21.4 percent from Hispanic households were rejected, and 33.9 percent from African American households were rejected.<sup>81</sup> Since redlining was still present, most minorities lived together; the racially disparate rejections can largely be explained on the neighborhood level, because individuals applying for assistance in poor, minority neighborhoods were more likely to be rejected.<sup>82</sup>

Increased loan access in low-income neighborhoods throughout the HCDA of 1977, targeted approaches with the HCDA of 1974, and other programs such as tax breaks on historical preservation projects contributed to the back-to-the-city movement experienced at this time. Even before the HCDA of 1977, about half of the 260 U.S. cities with a population of 50,000 or more were experiencing some level of gentrification.<sup>83</sup> Private developments in 1979 displaced an estimated 1.7 to 2.4 million Americans, proving the force of the back-to-the-city movement.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the nation’s oldest, inner-ring suburbs, those closest to the city, experienced deterioration.<sup>85</sup> Social concerns of the 1980s, such as drug-related crime and AIDS, concentrated in these low-income neighborhoods. Wealthier residents moved into newly emerging gentrifying neighborhoods or, more likely, retreated further into the ever-sprawling suburbs.

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<sup>78</sup> HUD Exchange, “The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program- Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://www.hudexchange.info/onecpd/assets/File/The-Community-Development-Block-Grant-FAQ.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Schill, 1319.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 1317.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Neil Smith, “Toward a Theory of Gentrification a Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 45, no. 4 (1979): 89.

<sup>84</sup> Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard, “Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices,” The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, April 2001.

<sup>85</sup> Frank Ford, “Is the Cuyahoga County Foreclosure Crisis Over? It depends on where you’re standing,” Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 17 March 2016.

Sprawl, in addition to gentrification in certain urban neighborhoods, characterized housing and development of the 1980s. Since 1970, 350,000 people left the city of Cleveland and an additional 100,000 left the inner-ring.<sup>86</sup> During the same period, the remaining area in the Cleveland metropolitan region, grew by 200,000 people—less than half the combined loss of the city and inner-ring.<sup>87</sup> Despite the population loss, the amount of developed land in Cleveland metropolitan counties increased by thirty-one percent from 1970 to 1990.<sup>88</sup> As a result, industries have been suburbanizing as well. Since 1980, two-thirds of all employment growth occurred outside of the city; less than twenty percent of all jobs existed within the city center of Detroit, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.<sup>89</sup> Most wealthy residents and businesses, and their associated tax revenue, left the cities.

The Reagan Administration put extra strain on struggling city governments by decreasing the amount of unrestricted funds that were previously provided to localities for any purpose. In 1980, federal and state contributions funded between forty and seventy percent of seventeen American city budgets.<sup>90</sup> By 1989, that was reduced to five cities. Federal contributions constituted 17.5 percent of total city budgets in 1977, and only 5.4 percent by 2000.<sup>91</sup> Programs previously used to combat income inequalities like mass transit, economic assistance, urban development action grants, social service block grants, public works, education, public service jobs, and job training all shrunk.

To make matters worse, in 1981, Congress ruled that ninety percent of residents in existing non-elderly federal public developments and ninety-five percent of tenants in newly constructed units must earn less than thirty percent of the area median income (AMI)—the first lowering of the income-level since the Housing Act of 1949.<sup>92</sup> This policy evicted many poor Americans and increased extreme poverty in blighted neighborhoods with public housing. While in 1974, only one percent of nonelderly public development residents earned less than ten percent of the AMI, by 1991, nineteen percent of development residents were below ten percent AMI.<sup>93</sup> With rising crime rates, poor public health, and less federal funding, cities struggled to

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<sup>86</sup> Mallach, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> William Julius Wilson, “The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty,” 566.

<sup>90</sup> William Julius Wilson, “The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty,” 566.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Schill, 1286.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1299.

provide necessary services to their low-income populations, which grew both in size and concentration, motivating most wealthier residents to recede into the suburbs.<sup>94</sup>

With less public funding, policymakers continued to look for ways to incentivize the private market to shoulder some of the housing burden of poor Americans, particularly through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) of 1986. With the LIHTC, housing agencies issued credit allocations to developers, to sell to investors to receive a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their federal tax liability over a ten-year period. Developers invest the raised capital to produce affordable rental units, which must be affordable for at least the first thirty years.<sup>95</sup> Since 1986, the LIHTC financed nearly 2.8 million apartments, serving 13.3 million residents, helping secure some low-income housing in gentrifying neighborhoods.<sup>96</sup> Although the program remains the primary means for low-income Americans to access public housing, there are only twenty-eight adequate and affordable units available nationwide for every one hundred renters earning no more than thirty percent AMI.<sup>97</sup> Although policy efforts looked to curb the influence of redlining and industrial transition, from 1970 to 1990 concentrated poverty doubled.<sup>98</sup>

### *Modern Neighborhood Development Policy*

In the 1990s, concentrated poverty decreased in urban Rust Belt populations due to depopulation and a new industrial footing. The minimum wage rose, unemployment dropped below four percent, and the LIHTC helped develop more low-income housing. President Clinton pushed for the HOPE VI program, which utilized competitive grants to revitalize public housing. From 1993 to 2008, \$6.1 billion funded 235 projects to demolish 96,200 public housing units and produce 107,800 new or renovated housing units.<sup>99</sup> The program reserved 56,800 of these units for the lowest income households, which represented an increase in both the number and quality of public housing following the program's inception.<sup>100</sup> A study revealed that a 700-unit HOPE

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<sup>94</sup> William Julius Wilson, "The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty," 562.

<sup>95</sup> National Housing Law Project, "Overview of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program (LIHTC), <https://nhlp.org/lihtcoverview>.

<sup>96</sup> National Multi-Family Household, "Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Fact Sheet," <http://www.nmhc.org/Advocacy/Low-Income-Housing-Tax-Credit-Fact-Sheet/>.

<sup>97</sup> Josh Leopold, Liza Getsinger, Pamela Blumenthal, Katya Abazajian, and Reed Jordan, "The Housing Affordability Gap for Extremely Low-Income Renters in 2013," *The Urban Institute*, June 2015.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Carey Nadeau, and Alan Berube, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Margery Austin Turner, G. Thomas Kingsley, "Federal Programs for Addressing Low-Income Housing Needs: A Policy Primer," *The Urban Institute*, December 2008.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

VI redevelopment project saved taxpayers \$22 million, compared to no redevelopment.<sup>101</sup> Local school performance and individual student performance also increased following HOPE VI investments. Nonetheless, HOPE VI proved only moderately effective at combating neighborhood poverty at large due to its limited funding and focus. Even in neighborhoods HOPE VI has improved, a proven association links HOPE VI's revitalization efforts with gentrification and displacement.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the shortcomings of Clinton's neighborhood development policy, from 1990 to 2000, the population of Americans living in concentrated poverty dropped by nearly one-quarter, whereas the number of concentrated poverty tracts dropped by twenty-nine percent.<sup>103</sup> In Detroit, the number of residents living in high-poverty neighborhoods decreased by seventy-five percent, representing a region-wide trend of rapid concentrated poverty mitigation.<sup>104</sup> The Rust Belt in particular benefitted from the decrease in concentrated poverty. In 1990, 14.1 percent of the poor U.S. population lived in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, however this number dropped to 9.1 percent by 2000.<sup>105</sup> Despite the deconcentration of poverty, the population of impoverished Americans increased by two million, largely due to population growth.<sup>106</sup> The dot-com boom of the 1990s improved the conditions of America's poor, much fewer of whom lived the double burden of being poor in a poor neighborhood by the end of the decade.

Demographic changes characterized the poverty trends of the 1990s. Over the decade, the number of Americans living in concentrated poverty fluctuated by race and ethnicity; it decreased by thirty-six percent among blacks, decreased by nineteen percent among whites, and, largely due to an influx of immigrants, increased by 1.6 percent among Hispanics.<sup>107</sup> This coincides with the continued trend of a worsening comparative picture for suburbs: while concentrated poverty decreased in urban and rural areas, it remained unchanged in suburban neighborhoods.<sup>108</sup> Americans living in concentrated poverty were significantly more likely to be

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<sup>101</sup> Raphael Bostic and Luke Tate, "Fighting Poverty and Creating Opportunity: The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative," HUD User, accessed 01 December 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard.

<sup>103</sup> Paul A. Jargowsky, "Stunning Progress, Hidden Problems: The Dramatic Decline of Concentrated Poverty in the 1990s," *Brookings Institution*, May 2013.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Carey Nadeau, and Alan Berube, 1.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>107</sup> Paul Jargowsky, "Stunning Progress, Hidden Problems: The Dramatic Decline of Concentrated Poverty in the 1990s."

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

white, have an education, receive no public benefits, and live in the suburbs by the end of the decade.<sup>109</sup> With Rust Belt residents heading West, a larger portion of city residents found work in the transitioned industries that were just starting to get their footing in the Rust Belt.

By the time Clinton became the first president to truly enforce the HUDA of 1977, financial institutions saw the profits of providing mortgage underwriting to low-income Americans.<sup>110</sup> Low-income homeownership rose from the 1980s through the recession of 2007. In the late 1990s, financial institutions ceased implementing “safe and sound” practices to provide for low-income neighborhoods’ credit needs by making subprime loans on houses whose prices were inflated by increased access to mortgage loans. This bubble burst in 2007 when the real estate collapse led to a national recession.<sup>111</sup> By the end of the decade in Cuyahoga County, home to Cleveland, eighty-four percent of foreclosures were from sub-prime lending.<sup>112</sup>

Even in the early years of the foreclosure crisis, concentrated poverty increased. Given the success of the 1990s in combating concentrated poverty, the topic faded from national consciousness until Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which vividly illustrated the plight of the urban poor.<sup>113</sup> However, between when the 1990s dot-com boom crashed in 2000 and 2005-2009, 2.2 million more Americans lived in concentrated poverty, which brought the total to 8.7 million.<sup>114</sup> This represents a total increase of one third of the population living in concentrated poverty, but in the Midwest concentrated poverty doubled. Nationally, the number of concentrated poverty neighborhoods increased by forty percent from 2000 to 2005-2009.<sup>115</sup> While 11.2 percent of such neighborhood residents were white in 2000, 16.5 percent were white in 2005-2009.<sup>116</sup> 10.5 percent of the American poor lived in concentrated poverty neighborhoods, up from 9.1 percent in 2000.<sup>117</sup>

At the same time, policy continued to incentivize gentrification. Of the neighborhood tracts in the bottom forty percent of income and home value in fifty American metropolitan

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Ford, “Is the Cuyahoga County Foreclosure Crisis Over? It depends on where you’re standing,” Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 17 March 2016.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Alessandro Coppola, “A Cleveland Model? Experiments in Alternative Urbanism in the Rust Belt,” *Metropolises*, 15 (2014): 7.

<sup>113</sup> William Julius Wilson, “The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Poverty,” 555.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Carey Nadeau, and Alan Berube, 5.

<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, “U.S. Concentrated Poverty in the Wake of the Great Recession,” *The Brookings Institution*, 31 March 2016.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Carey Nadeau, and Alan Berube, 1.

areas, one-fifth experienced signs of gentrification since 2000—more than double the proportion from the 1990s.<sup>118</sup> With some people moving into select urban neighborhoods and others continuing to sprawl outwards, poverty continued to move into inner-ring suburbs. While eighty percent of the nation’s concentrated poverty existed in cities from 2005-2009, the concentrated poor population in the suburbs grew at triple the rate between the dot-com crash and the recession.

In response to these trends, President Obama led many community development and affordable housing initiatives. The Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 provided \$3.9 billion to CDBGs throughout the nation to support the acquisition, demolition, and rehabilitation of vacant and abandoned homes.<sup>119</sup> The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 earmarked \$80 billion for low income Americans, including a temporary increase in the LIHTC and neighborhood stabilization efforts.<sup>120</sup> Replacing HOPE VI in 2012 with \$120 million in funding its first year, Obama’s Choice Neighborhoods program (CN) provides grants primarily for the purpose of revitalizing public housing and assisting private developments and whole neighborhoods.<sup>121</sup> A CN investment study in New Orleans found that a \$30.5 million dollar grant leveraged over \$1 billion in investments into a community.<sup>122</sup> Given such programs’ association with gentrification, however, these capital investments might not be viewed positively by everyone.

Despite the Obama Administration’s targeted efforts to assist struggling neighborhoods, between 2005-2009 and 2010-2014, the number of Americans living in concentrated poverty increased by five million, bringing the total to 13.8 million or more than double the rate of 6.7 million from 2000. Most of this increase came from the Rust Belt or the Sun Belt, identified as the western states such as California and Arizona where many working class people sought work following the deindustrialization and depopulation of Rust Belt cities since the 1950s. The rate of concentrated poverty increased at double the rate of cities after the recession. Of the 13.8 million

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<sup>118</sup> Mike Maciag, “Gentrification in America Report,” *Governing the States and Localities*, February 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Kathryn W. Hexter, Cathryn Greenwald, Maxine Goodman Levin, and Mary Helen Petrus, “Sustainable Reuse Strategies for Vacant and Abandoned Properties,” Ohio Urban University Program, October 2008.

<sup>120</sup> William Julius Wilson, “Combating Concentrated Poverty in Urban Neighborhoods,” *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 7, no. 2 (September 2013), 141.

<sup>121</sup> Linda Couch, “Public Housing: Choice Neighborhoods Initiative and HOPE VI,” *National Low Income Housing Coalition*, 2014, <http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2014AG-128.pdf>.

<sup>122</sup> Raphael Bostic and Luke Tate, “Fighting Poverty and Creating Opportunity: The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative,” HUD User, accessed 01 December 2016.

people living in concentrated poverty neighborhoods, 6.3 million, or 13.5 percent of America's poor, experienced the double burden of living in a poor neighborhood. At 13.5 percent, the proportion of concentration among the poor was three percent more than from 2005-2009 and only 0.6 percent less than the pre-1990s boom rate.<sup>123</sup>

Racially, the post-recession period was a departure from the increasingly white composition of impoverished neighborhoods; the Hispanic concentrated poverty rate increased by 4.7 percent, for blacks it increased by 3.9 percent, and for whites the increase was only 1.4 percent. Poor Hispanics and blacks were, respectively, three and five times more likely to live in such neighborhoods than whites. For most Rust Belt cities and minorities, the progress of the 1990s was erased.<sup>124</sup>

Hit hard by the recession, Rust Belt cities continue to depopulate. Detroit retains seventy-two percent of its 2000 population, Cleveland retains eighty-two percent, and Pittsburgh retains ninety-two percent. Continued depopulation and the lasting effects of the foreclosure crisis created the predominant characteristics of these shrinking, struggling Rust Belt cities: vacancy, abandonment, and blight. Statistics from Philadelphia, Detroit, and Baltimore prove exactly that with 60,000, 40,000, and 26,000 abandoned or vacant properties respectively.<sup>125</sup>

From 2000 until 2010-2014, the share of poor Pittsburghers living in concentrated poverty increased by more than five percent. In six Rust Belt cities that increase was greater than thirty-five percent, indicating Pittsburgh's relative strength in the region as well as pointing towards the city's underlying gentrification concerns.<sup>126</sup> One-fifth of poor Pittsburghers lived in concentrated poverty from 2010-2014.<sup>127</sup> Seventy percent of poor Pittsburghers lived in a neighborhood with at least a twenty percent poverty rate by the end of the recession.<sup>128</sup> Since its peak census year in 1950, Pittsburgh lost fifty-five percent of its peak population, although the population decline has slowed in recent years.<sup>129</sup> Like many other depopulated Rust Belt cities, Pittsburgh struggles with vacant land, with 27,000 currently vacant lots across the city.<sup>130</sup> Despite

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<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Natalie Holmes.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> John Edwards, Marion Crain, and Arne L. Kalleberg, "The New Urban Poverty," In *Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream*, New Press, April 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, Natalie Holmes.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Pittsburgh Population," 11 October 2016, Accessed 06 December 2016, [https://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=kf7tgg1uo9ude\\_&met\\_y=population&idim=place:4261000:3916000&hl=en&dl=en](https://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=kf7tgg1uo9ude_&met_y=population&idim=place:4261000:3916000&hl=en&dl=en).

far better than many similar Rust Belt cities in terms of recent high and concentrated poverty trends, Pittsburgh ought to recognize that these vacant lots represent where the city currently stands in comparison to its once thriving past.

### *Conclusion*

With the underlying systemic harm of redlining, federal policy continuously fails to navigate the housing and development markets. Through mortgage loans and developmental assistance, the federal government largely controls where potential homebuyers will live. Redlining disparately hurts poor, minority neighborhoods, which creates concentrations of poverty.

Current policy solutions are only moderately successful at addressing the concerns of residents in concentrated poverty neighborhoods. Mobility policies like Section 8 are ineffective at providing low-income Americans residential mobility and do little to improve their home neighborhood. The history of concentrated poverty in the Rust Belt demonstrates that federal distribution of development and home loan assistance affects where people live. Federal policies contributing to placemaking such as CDBGs, the HCDA of 1977, the LIHTC of 1986, HOPE VI, and CN have been moderately successful at placemaking. However, they often come at the risk of promoting gentrification. Reinvestment in some urban neighborhoods combined with the deterioration of older, inner-ring suburbs caused those in poverty to move into the inner-ring over time. The vulnerability of certain neighborhoods to the demands of transitioning economies, the real estate crisis, and developing concerns over gentrification can largely be traced back to the initial problems of redlining. In the Rust Belt, vacant land is a symbol of this history and an opportunity to improve past housing and neighborhood development policy.

### **Legal Background**

In order to consider the history of gentrification and concentrated poverty, it is necessary to examine the legal background of such topics. Over the last half century, the Supreme Court has initiated progress with regard to fair and equal housing through several key decisions.

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<sup>130</sup> Pittsburgh City Planning, "Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit," 2015, 4, Accessed 15 September 2016, [http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/VLTK\\_12-8-15.pdf](http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/VLTK_12-8-15.pdf).

However, there is still much progress to be made in order to ensure complete fairness and equality.

First, it should be noted that while fair housing is inherently an issue of income and resources, most of the questions addressed by the Supreme Court on this topic focus on the intersection of race and fair housing, rather than the intersection of poverty and fair housing. A major determinant of this is that race and poverty are inextricably linked in today's housing market. In addition, there currently exist no legal barriers to discrimination on the basis of income or social class. As a result, a significant majority of relevant Supreme Court decisions are based on jurisprudence that stems from the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees each citizen "equal protection" and "due process" under the law. In addition, the Court harkens back to the legal precedent established by the Fair Housing Act, which protects against discrimination that results from a person's inclusion in a protected class. It is important to note that income and class are not currently included in the list of protected classes; to put it simply, the impoverished are not a protected class. As a result, none of the existing jurisprudence that applies to housing policy directly addresses the question of poverty or its relationship to fair housing practices in the United States.

One of the earliest Supreme Court cases to address the issue of fair and equitable housing was decided in 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*. In this case, the African American Shelley family purchased a house in St. Louis, Missouri, unaware that a racially-restrictive covenant had been in place on the property since 1911. Until this time in Missouri and throughout the United States, racially-restrictive covenants were the norm and a major contributor to housing segregation in the nation. The Vinson Court held that "restrictive racially-based covenants are not, on their face, valid under the Fourteenth Amendment."<sup>131</sup> The Court clarified that, at the time, private parties could voluntarily abide by such covenants but that they may not seek judicial enforcement of such agreements, as that would constitute state action. Such state action would necessarily be discriminatory, and thus would violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

*Jones v. Mayer Co.* (1968), marked the Court's next step toward establishing a legal precedent for fair and equitable housing. In the late 1960s, Joseph Lee Jones, a black man, filed a lawsuit in which he alleged that Alfred H. Mayer Co. refused to sell him and his family a home

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<sup>131</sup> *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

in a particular, majority white neighborhood solely on account of his race. The Supreme Court's ruling pushed their decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* even further, holding that racially restrictive covenants, or any such similar agreements, are invalid under the Constitution. Furthermore, the Court held that Congress could put in place regulations to prevent racial discrimination in the sale of private property, even between two private parties. The Court drew precedent for its decision from the Thirteenth Amendment as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which stated that Congress had the power to intervene in private affairs in an effort to fight off any discrimination resulting from the "badges and incidents of slavery."<sup>132</sup> In effect, this decision barred all forms of racial discrimination, private as well as public, in the sale or rental of property.

*Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.* reflected a wider understanding of fair housing and its relationship to race. In 1977, the Village of Arlington Heights was sued for discriminatory housing policies. This Chicago suburb had a zoning ordinance at the time which barred the construction of multi-family housing facilities (including apartment complexes) in the center of the neighborhood. This zoning requirement for single-family homes had been in place since 1959. The practical effect of this policy kept poor and minority families from residing in the same neighborhood as white, richer families. The Court, in deciding this case, expanded the jurisprudence surrounding fair housing and based its ruling on discriminatory intent. In this situation, the Court ruled that the ordinance was constitutional, as it had been steadily applied without exception since 1959 and, as such, the Metropolitan Housing Development Corp. could not prove discriminatory intent, despite the disparate impact on minority communities.

In recent years, the Court has hinted that it could move away from the discriminatory intent test in fair housing decisions, and rely more heavily on the disparate impact test. In 2015 the Supreme Court took on *Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. The Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.*, in which they asked whether disparate impact claims are cognizable under the Fair Housing Act. Currently, the federal government provides funding for tax credits for developers who build affordable housing. These tax credits are distributed by local communities, and in Texas, preference was given for the development of housing in specifically low-income areas. The Inclusive Communities Project sued the Texas agency responsible for

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<sup>132</sup> Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co., 392 U.S. 409 (1968).

administering the tax credits, claiming it disproportionately allocated too many tax credits in “predominantly black inner-city areas and too few in predominantly white suburban neighborhoods.”<sup>133</sup> The practical result of this policy was that affordable housing became increasingly harder to find in largely white and more affluent neighborhoods, and instead all affordable housing ended up being available only in low-income, minority communities. The Court held that disparate impact claims can be made in relation to the Fair Housing Act, arguing that Congress had specifically intended to include such arguments in its understanding of the Fair Housing Act. However, the Court also held that disparate impact claims require the plaintiff to prove that the defendant’s policies are what caused the disparity. With some caveats, this case cemented the use of the disparate impact legal precedent when the Court is faced with a question of affordable housing and its relation to race in America.

### **Current Status of Pittsburgh**

Population loss in Pittsburgh caused lasting effects on the city. This trend of population loss continued until 2010, when the census showed the first year of positive population growth since the steel collapse occurred in the 1980s.<sup>134</sup> During these years of population loss, the city attempted to rebound by pursuing an economic shift to a wider variety of industries that historically survived economic downturn. Some of the industries that Pittsburgh has actively pursued include the medical, educational, and technical industries. The economic growth that resulted from the city’s transition to these industries, combined with the stemming population loss, has contributed to Pittsburgh’s path of relative prosperity in the region. Today these industries make up Pittsburgh’s economic center.

In recent years, Pittsburgh has slowly transitioned back to relative economic health in the region. However, Pittsburgh has not dealt with this transition in the most equitable way, raising concerns over the city’s ability to create manageable growth. An example of this is the striking increase in local housing prices and property values in recent years. Just in 2015, Pittsburgh real estate gained six percent in value, which is considered a larger-than-expected growth for the

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<sup>133</sup> Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. Inclusive Communities Project, Inc., 576 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2015).

<sup>134</sup> Kyle Fee and Kathryn Holston, “The Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland*.

region.<sup>135</sup> Increasing property values can contribute to the solidification of concentrated and high poverty areas throughout Pittsburgh, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>136</sup>

In early 2015, the Pittsburgh City Council approved legislation to create an Affordable Housing Task Force in recognition of the changing landscape of housing affordability throughout the city.<sup>137</sup> After more than a year of research and community feedback, the Task Force published their report which makes three primary recommendations for confronting the issue of housing affordability in Pittsburgh. The Task Force

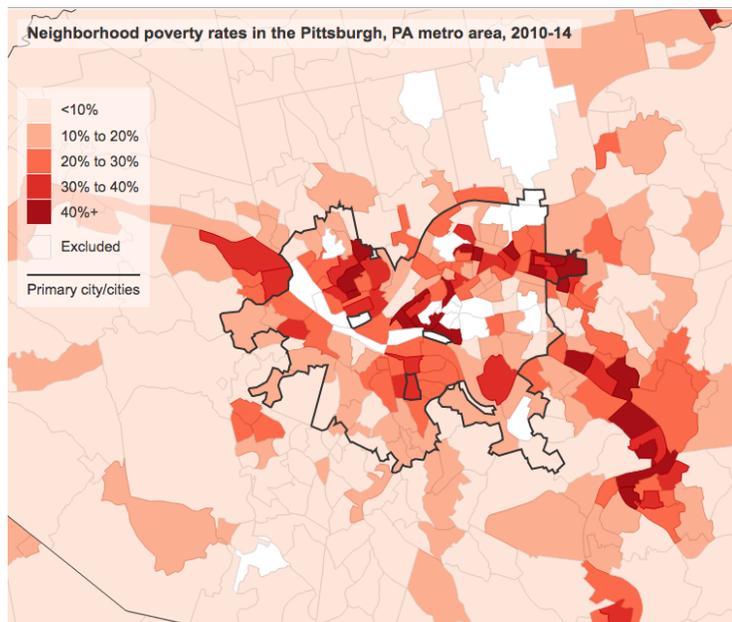


Figure 1

recommended the creation of a Pittsburgh Housing Trust Fund, better utilization of Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs), and the preservation of existing affordable housing and protection of current residents.<sup>138</sup> These recommendations were published in May 2016 and will guide the future of affordable housing in the city.

Despite its struggles, Pittsburgh still strives to achieve its motto of “A Most Livable City.”<sup>139</sup> Today, the Pittsburgh city population tops over 300,000, with most of those residents employed in the top three industries in Pittsburgh: medicine, education, and technology.<sup>140</sup> While Pittsburgh’s trend of population loss began to reverse in 2010 with the first year of positive population growth in the city, the past four years has seen relatively small population growth or even stagnation.<sup>141</sup> However, this recent trend does not hold for younger generations. The

<sup>135</sup> Tim Grant, “Pittsburgh’s Real Estate Market Shows No Sign of Slowing Down,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1 February 2016.

<sup>136</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes.

<sup>137</sup> Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Task Force, “Findings and Recommendations Mayor William Peduto and the Pittsburgh City Council,” 31 May 2016.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Deb Smit, “The Economist names Pittsburgh the Most Livable City (on the mainland) again,” *Next Pittsburgh*, 14 August 2014.

<sup>140</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts - Pittsburgh City, Pennsylvania,” Accessed 04 December 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/4261000>.

Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Task Force reported that the twenty-five to thirty-four age group is currently the fastest growing population in Pittsburgh; the associated cultural change in market preference toward city living has been tied directly to increased competition for residential urban space, which caused rising housing prices and property values in these newly popular areas.<sup>142</sup>

Pittsburgh's historical struggle to create a fair and equitable housing market still exists today. Currently, only ten percent of residential units in Pittsburgh are income restricted.<sup>143</sup> In addition, there is a shortage of over seventeen thousand affordable housing units.<sup>144</sup> In conjunction, these statistics demonstrate the urgent need for Pittsburgh to recommit to developing affordable housing and encouraging housing equality throughout the city. However, the city must recognize the haunting effect of past federal and local housing policies on minority communities, and the resulting lack of confidence. Recent trends of rapid redevelopment in poor and minority communities in Pittsburgh have generated new complaints and concerns about how redevelopment will be handled in upcoming years, especially in neighborhoods that have not experienced a recent influx of investment. How Pittsburgh moves forward in the creation of fair and equitable housing policies will be "the ultimate test of whether Pittsburgh lives up to its title of 'Most Livable City.'<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Gary Rotstein, "Census shows population decline in Pittsburgh region," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. 24 March 2016.

<sup>142</sup> Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Task Force.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Causes of Concentrated Poverty**

Concentrated poverty is primarily caused by a compounding series of socio-economic factors that trap impoverished individuals in the cycle of poverty. The cycle of poverty is the phenomenon whereby poor children and families become trapped in poverty throughout future generations and fail to improve their socio-economic status. People who are raised and live in areas of concentrated poverty experience more disadvantages compared to those who live in less impoverished areas. There are two major causes of concentrated poverty: economic policies that prevent adequate education and a lack of transportation that inhibits social mobility. It should be noted that the root causes of concentrated poverty are difficult to isolate, as most causes become cyclical impacts.

## **Inequitable School Funding**

One major cause of concentrated poverty is the tax system, which immediately positions schools in impoverished areas at an innate disadvantage compared to schools located in areas of higher income. Public school systems derive a significant proportion of their funding from local taxes, which are higher in wealthier neighborhoods due to increased property values. According to the Center for Educational Research, approximately ninety-three percent of school district funding is derived from state, local county, or city taxes.<sup>146</sup> Local funding comes primarily from property taxes and income taxes, which significantly fluctuate by locality, and thus make school funding a major contributor to entrenched poverty.<sup>147</sup> If an area is already impoverished, and only has public schools, then these schools will be underfunded, often leading to failure or underperformance when measured against federal and state standards.

A study by Fault Lines clearly illustrates how pockets of concentrated poverty both drive differential access to education. For example, the nation's most income segregated school districts exist in Detroit. The Grosse Pointe School District and Detroit School District are two primary school districts that are directly adjacent. Grosse Pointe has a poverty rate of 6.52 percent while the Detroit School District has a poverty rate of nearly fifty percent. Median property values are \$220,100 and \$45,100 respectively. Median household incomes compare at

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<sup>146</sup> "How Do We Fund Our Schools?" *PBS*, 05 September 2008.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

\$90,542 to \$26,087. It is also essential to note that students enrolled in Grosse Pointe schools receive personalized learning plans, in addition to other benefits such as healthy lunches cooked on site daily. In stark contrast to this, the Detroit School District is decrepit. School buildings are falling apart. At Spain Elementary in the Detroit School District, the playground closed indefinitely due to a damaged pipe spewing fog onto the playground. Simultaneously, the gym was recently shut down with the discovery of black mold growing in the ceiling and under the floor. Conditions have grown so terrible that district teachers have begun staging “sick-outs,” which are essentially strikes to protest the horrid conditions and lack of funding to fix the schools.<sup>148</sup> This is a massive discrepancy demonstrating the relationship between poverty and school district quality.

Discrepancies in school funding perpetuate a cycle of poverty whereby students in high and concentrated poverty areas have access to poorly-funded education. Graduates from these schools are more likely to lack the skills to find high paying work than those from better funded education systems. One example of this is that well-funded schools can afford to buy newer technology such as computers. As a result, high school students with access to technology can take more extensive computer science courses, which increases the likelihood that these students will seek out jobs in that industry.<sup>149</sup> Jobs in the computer science industry are increasingly bountiful and well paying.<sup>150</sup> Instead of having opportunities like this available to them, students in poor schools are subject to a less extensive curriculum. These students relegate to staying in the impoverished area, as they do not have the education to get a job elsewhere. This continues the cycle of poverty. An inadequate education caused by insufficient school funding is a barrier to advancement, and if students cannot receive a good education, they will be unable to escape poverty.

The Carolina Abecedarian Project of 1974 demonstrated how students are capable of escaping poverty if they receive an exceptional early childhood education. Local schools in the areas of the Abecedarian Project were unable to provide a high quality education due to local tax shortfalls. The Abecedarian Project randomly allocated children aged one to five living below the poverty line to an exceptional free early “Abecedarian Education.” Which entailed four core

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<sup>148</sup> “Why Detroit’s Teachers are ‘Sick’ of their Inadequate Schools,” *PBS*, 09 February 2016.

<sup>149</sup> Nick Pandolfo, “As Some Schools Plunge into Technology, Poor Schools Are Left Behind,” *The Hechinger Report*, 2012.

<sup>150</sup> “Occupational Outlook Handbook,” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 2015, <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/software-developers.htm>.

curriculums: spoken language priority, conversational reading skills, enriched care giving (medical treatment by pediatricians), and learning games that encouraged interaction with other children. Students in the control group received the typical area education. Students were then followed through adulthood via periodic check-ups from age twelve to thirty-five. Those who received the exceptional early education maintained statistically significant advantages both in intellectual test performance and in scores on academic tests of high school level reading and writing skills. The treated group also on average attended more years of school. In addition, recipients of the Abecedarian Curriculum were more likely to attend a four-year college or university. Also, upon reaching adulthood, these children had higher paying jobs. Members of the control group were over twenty percent less likely to attend college and twenty-five percent more likely to be teen parents. This study demonstrates that poor education is a contributing cause of continued poverty.<sup>151</sup>

### **Inadequate Transportation Options**

Lack of transportation options, or inadequate systems of transportation, also causes concentrated poverty. The advancement of people in these communities is severely inhibited when residents are unable to get to jobs outside of their immediate vicinity. A study by the Surface Transportation Policy project asserts that welfare households are clustered in central city or inner suburban neighborhoods, which are generally areas of high or concentrated poverty.<sup>152</sup> A significant number of job opportunities were in outer suburbs far away from recipients' central city homes; many of these suburban jobs were inaccessible by any mode of transportation other than a car.<sup>153</sup> Building on this notion, the fact that one is poor means that having a car is often an unrealistic option. This report also notes that the poorest fifth of Americans spend forty-two percent of their annual household budget on the purchase, operation, and maintenance of automobiles, which is more than twice the national average.<sup>154</sup> An alarming statistic reveals that three in every five jobs suitable for people engaged in welfare to-work participants are not accessible by public transportation.<sup>155</sup> A welfare to work program is a government-subsidized

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<sup>151</sup> "The Abecedarian Project," Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015, Accessed 03 December 2016, <http://abc.fpg.unc.edu/>.

<sup>152</sup> "Transportation and Poverty Alleviation," Surface Transportation Policy Project, 09 December 2016, Accessed 03 December 2016, [http://transact.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Transportation\\_and\\_Poverty\\_Alleviation.pdf](http://transact.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Transportation_and_Poverty_Alleviation.pdf).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

program that provides vocational training to those currently on welfare.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, ninety percent of people who receive welfare do not have regular access to a car.<sup>157</sup> With these facts in mind, it is clear that inadequate public transportation both causes and contributes to concentrated poverty. Most simply, if individuals in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty cannot physically get to their jobs, they cannot keep their jobs. Without a reliable and less expensive means of transportation, these residents are restricted to jobs offered in their immediate vicinity, thus limiting opportunity, choice, and financial improvement.

Inequitable school funding and lack of adequate transportation are two major causes of concentrated poverty. A poor education relegates people to low paying jobs and these low paying jobs trap them in poverty. In addition, if an impoverished person does manage to find a job that pays better than local jobs, often there is no adequate option of transportation to the job. These factors both discourage mobility and advancement, which in turn perpetuates concentrated poverty.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> California Department of Social Services, "Welfare-to-Work," 2007, Accessed 03 December 2016, <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/pg141.htm>.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

## **Case Studies**

In order to understand the dynamics of housing and poverty and to glean possible policy ideas, we examined several other cities that share key characteristics with Pittsburgh. The two cities we considered were Portland, Oregon, because it has an affordable housing crisis and an up-and-coming tech sector and Cleveland, Ohio because it is a post-industrial rust belt city with similar demographics and economic challenges to Pittsburgh.

### **Portland**

Portland makes for a useful case study because it is similar to Pittsburgh in several important respects. Both cities are regarded as up-and-coming and have booming tech industries. In 2015, most of Portland's population growth was from in-migration, primarily of educated millennials.<sup>158</sup> From 2010-2013, Portland's tech industry grew by thirty percent, outpacing better-known tech centers like Austin, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.<sup>159</sup> Portland is also a fruitful case study because, like Pittsburgh, Portland has a reputation for affordability that is vanishing with rising rents. Since 2007, Portland's average rent has risen by sixty-three percent, including five consecutive years of average rent increases above five percent.<sup>160</sup> Between 2011 and 2015, average home costs in Portland rose by forty-four percent, or over \$100,000.<sup>161</sup> Finally, both Portland and Pittsburgh have affordable housing unit shortages that are roughly proportional. Currently, demand for affordable housing in Portland exceeds supply by 80,000 units.<sup>162</sup> It is not hard to look at Portland and see Pittsburgh's trajectory. The cities might not have a shared past, but they do have a common reality, and they are on the same path going forward.

In 2015, Portland's City Commissioner and City Council recognized the severity of their affordable housing crisis by declaring a "state of emergency" related to the city's lack of affordable housing.<sup>163</sup> At that time, the city also issued a call for sweeping changes to its housing policies with a focus on building new affordable units. Since then, Portland City Council has

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<sup>158</sup> Laura Frazier, "Portland is the 26th Largest City in The U.S., New Census Figures Show," *The Oregonian*, 18 May 2016.

<sup>159</sup> Maria Spencer, "Portland's tech talent growth outpaces Silicon Valley," *Bizjournal*, 13 August 2016.

<sup>160</sup> Craig Beebee, "Portland's Housing Crisis: Four Charts to Ponder," *Oregon Metro News*, 28 January 2016.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Portland Housing Bureau, "State of Housing in Portland," 2016, Accessed 30 November 2016, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/phb/article/619248>.

passed nearly a dozen laws that establish affordable housing programs or obligate funds to finance new affordable housing units. Notably, several of these new policies mirror the recommendations put forward by Pittsburgh’s Affordable Housing Taskforce, including a special fund for affordable housing projects, inclusionary zoning laws, and leveraging tax incentives to promote low-and-mixed-income housing units.

In 2015, Portland City Council tripled the annual amount of tax exemption resources for affordable housing, from \$1 million to \$3 million.<sup>164</sup> The City Commissioner also modified the tax exemption program to increase participation. The program incentivizes housing developers to make at least twenty percent of their units affordable to households earning sixty percent of the AMI or lower. Though the city has not yet calculated the direct impact of this policy change, they project that these changes to the tax exemptions will increase by between fifty to 100 percent the number of new private developments in the city that include affordable housing.<sup>165</sup>

In October 2015, the Portland Housing Bureau released \$61.5 million for affordable housing development. This increase in funding introduces 1,200 new units to be created in the next five years available to households making under sixty percent of the area median income.<sup>166</sup>

In Fall 2015, City Council voted to increase the tax increment financing in each of ten designated development areas from thirty percent to forty-five percent, which will raise \$67,000,000 in additional affordable housing funds until 2024. This translates to approximately 1,400 new affordable units.<sup>167</sup>

In December 2015, the City Council also voted to impose a new tax on short-term rental companies dedicated to funding new affordable housing projects. This tax is expected to raise \$1.2 million for affordable housing projects annually, and \$25 million over twenty years, which translates to approximately twenty-five new affordable units each year.<sup>168</sup>

In June 2016, City Council also created a one percent excise tax on commercial and residential construction. The city estimates that the tax will raise \$8-9 million each year in new revenue to fund additional affordable housing units targeted at households earning between zero to sixty percent of the area median income. This translates to approximately 200 new affordable units each year.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Portland Housing Bureau, “State of Housing in Portland,” 2016.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

In June 2016, Portland City Council also recommended that the City of Portland issue \$258 million of general obligation bonds to fund new affordable housing projects. In November, Portland voters approved the bonds, which will allow Portland to build and preserve 1,300 new units of affordable housing targeted at households earning between zero to sixty percent of the AMI.<sup>170</sup>

In December 2016, Portland City Council is expected to approve a new inclusionary zoning policy, which will require developers to include twenty percent of units affordable to households earning eighty percent of the area median income, ten percent of units affordable to households earning sixty percent of the area median income, or pay a fee into an inclusionary housing fund that will support new affordable housing units.<sup>171</sup>

All told, the changes made by Portland's city government represent a significant investment into the Portland Housing Bureau. In FY 2015-16, the agency's budget was \$54,083,224. In FY 2016-2017, the projected budget is \$204,036,744, an increase of \$149,953,520, or 277 percent.<sup>172</sup> Over the next ten years, these adjustments are projected to create approximately 10,000 new affordable housing units, which will increase the current total number of affordable units in the city to approximately 25,000, a fifty percent increase.<sup>173</sup>

Like Pittsburgh, Portland also grapples with areas of high and concentrated poverty, which coincide with a high degree of racial segregation. While the area median income for a white household is nearly \$60,000, the area median income for Black and Native American households is below \$30,000 and the area median income for a Hispanic household is \$36,000.<sup>174</sup> As housing prices rise, Portland's communities are becoming more segregated, as non-white residents are increasingly forced into just a handful of neighborhoods.

Several of Portland's housing and urban development policies intended to address concentrated poverty have focused on making use of vacant land to revitalize communities. In the 1970s, Portland's City Government worked with the state government to implement "Goal 10," a housing policy initiative designed to increase available housing units by developing vacant land. Goal 10 mandated that Portland utilize vacant land to increase the average housing density

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<sup>169</sup> Portland Housing Bureau, "State of Housing in Portland," 2016.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

in the city to at least ten units per acre. Between 1977 and 1982, Goal 10 more than doubled the number of building housing units in Portland, and significantly decreased the cost of vacant land lots.<sup>175</sup>

In the 1990s, Portland adopted a series of new programs and governmental reforms designed to repurpose its nearly 3,000 vacant lots to create new housing units and promote other community development strategies. One centerpiece of this effort was to integrate it into their existing affordable housing strategies by devoting public funds to developing new housing units.<sup>176</sup> Portland also equipped private developers to transform vacant land by scaling back regulations, building more flexibility into the regulatory system, and creating financial incentives, such as tax credits, to developers pursuing revitalization or affordable housing projects.<sup>177</sup> By scaling back regulations, Portland reduced the time frame to acquire and develop land to just one year, spurring investment. Finally, Portland partnered with Community Development Corporations (CDCs), providing nonprofit groups with grants, resources, and training to help them compete with market-rate development projects. By 2000, Portland had cut its number of vacant properties in half, with nearly all of the investment going to affordable housing and community redevelopment.<sup>178</sup>

In 1999, Portland City Council created “Proud Ground,” a Community Land Trust program serving several of Portland’s poorest neighborhoods. Proud Ground helps Portland residents purchase homes and provides educational resources about homeownership. It also acquires vacant properties to be converted into new affordable housing units. Since 1999, Proud Ground has created 310 new households, including 250 homes designated and zoned as “forever affordable.” The median sale price of a Proud Ground supported home is fifty percent the median sale price of a market rate home in the same neighborhood. Proud Ground projects to serve another 300 households in the next five years. Sixty percent of people served by Proud Ground are people of color. So far, no home supported by the land trust has foreclosed.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Myron Orfield, “Land Use and Housing Policies to Reduce Concentrated Poverty and Racial Segregation,” *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 33 (2005): 115.

<sup>176</sup> Schilling, J. M., “The Revitalization of Vacant Properties: Where Broken Windows Meet Smart Growth.” Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Proud Ground, “Statistics, Facts, and Figures,” Accessed 30 November 2016, [https://proudground.org/facts\\_figures/](https://proudground.org/facts_figures/).

More recently, Portland has created a public/private partnership between the City Government and the nonprofit Network of Oregon Affordable Housing (NOAH). The central focus of this new partnership is to acquire and develop vacant land in Portland into affordable housing units and other community development projects. In addition to a \$1 million investment, Portland has also lowered capital requirements and interest rates to further incentivize development.<sup>180</sup>

Like Portland, Pittsburgh has many parcels of vacant land, particularly in areas of concentrated poverty. The city could look to Portland and make use of vacant properties to build new housing units and promote a placemaking strategy that revitalizes communities of high and concentrated poverty.

## **Cleveland**

Another useful case study is Cleveland, Ohio, which has a similar history to Pittsburgh and faces many of the same challenges. Like Pittsburgh, Cleveland was once a thriving industrial city in the heart of the American Rust Belt. The city's strategic positioning on Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River made it ideal for manufacturing, especially steel.<sup>181</sup> At its peak in 1950, Cleveland's population was over 914,000, and twenty-seven percent of the city was employed in manufacturing. Now, manufacturing employs only ten percent of Cleveland's workers.<sup>182</sup> Less than forty-three percent of the city's peak population remains, similar to Pittsburgh, whose population is forty-five percent of its peak.<sup>183</sup> Both cities also have high rates of vacancy, a consequence of this dramatic population decline.<sup>184</sup> Cleveland and Pittsburgh are of a similar size, and have similar demographic makeups, including similar unemployment rates, high rates of segregation, and a majority white population.<sup>185</sup>

Like Pittsburgh, Cleveland has neighborhoods of concentrated poverty that are predominantly black. For instance, Cleveland's Central Neighborhood, a once-flourishing

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<sup>180</sup> Dan Saltzman, "Affordable Housing Updates," City of Portland, Accessed 01 October 2016, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/saltzman/68966>.

<sup>181</sup> Alessandro Coppola, 4.

<sup>182</sup> United States Federal Reserve, "The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America," *The Brookings Institution* (2008).

<sup>183</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Pittsburgh Population."

<sup>184</sup> Michelle Jarboe, "Vacant Houses, Blighted Buildings Still Plague Cleveland, But Problem is Shrinking: Taking Stock."

<sup>185</sup> United States Federal Reserve, "The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America," *The Brookings Institution* (2008).

manufacturing center, now has a poverty rate of 65.1 percent. Dramatic population loss in this neighborhood has led to many vacant, blighted properties. Ninety-two percent of Central Neighborhood residents are African American, and only 8.2 percent own their own home.<sup>186</sup> It is similar to Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, which has a similar history and similar demographics.

Cleveland is also experiencing an affordable housing crisis that is similar to Pittsburgh's. In 2015, affordable housing was "out of reach" for most Cleveland residents, and 55,000 required subsidies to pay their rents, while sixty percent of Cleveland residents spent at least thirty percent of their income on housing.<sup>187</sup> Similar to Pittsburgh, Cleveland's new housing developments are mostly private, market-rate projects that do not cater to the city's many low-income residents.

Cleveland has enacted several policies in the last half-century to address some of its problems related to housing, poverty, and deindustrialization. In 1976, Cleveland established a Land Bank to acquire lots abandoned following deindustrialization and use that land for future development projects. In 2009, the city supported a stronger, county-wide solution by establishing the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation (CCLRC).<sup>188</sup> The CCLRC provides a valuable case study because its aggressive vacant land acquisition and redevelopment strategy has proven cost-effective and has improved the economic outlook of poor communities. The CCLRC states that it exists to "strategically acquire properties, return them to productive uses, reduce blight, increase property values, support community goals, and improve the quality of life for county residents."<sup>189</sup> Funding for these land-acquisition programs primarily comes from interest and penalties on unpaid or delinquent property taxes and assessments collected by the county auditor. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allowed the land banks to acquire HUD-owned properties for \$100. In subsequent deals, the land banks agreed to acquire vacant land from lenders, like Fannie Mae, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo, in exchange for the lenders paying the demolition costs. By 2013, the city had acquired 12,000 vacant parcels of property.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Northeast Ohio Coalition for The Homeless, "2015-2016 Facts Supporting the Housing Crisis that Exists in Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland," 26 February 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Marcia Brown, "When a Vacant Lot Goes Green," Policy Matters Ohio, 2015, Accessed 05 December 2016, <http://www.policymattersohio.org/blight-sept2015>.

<sup>189</sup> Cuyahoga Land Bank, "Welcome to the Cuyahoga Land Bank," Accessed 05 December 2016, <http://www.cuyahogalandbank.org/>.

A CCLRC analysis indicated that homes located near land bank properties sold for five percent more than homes in similar markets not located near land bank properties. Additionally, homes located near vacant properties not yet acquired by the land bank sold for between three and five percent less than homes not near vacant profits. This translates to a nine percent net benefit in local property values for lots acquired by the land bank. Another 2013 report estimates a \$156 million total impact on the housing market.<sup>191</sup> Finally, land bank activity improved the value of homes not sold, infusing more funds into the community for development, and building a stronger local tax base.<sup>192</sup> Pittsburgh policymakers should follow Cleveland's lead, implementing an aggressive, pragmatic vision for the city's vacant lots.

However, Cleveland has also fallen short of making productive use of every public policy tool at their disposal. This should be instructive to policy makers in Pittsburgh because they can analyze Cleveland's shortcomings to avoid repeating their mistakes. One of Cleveland's housing policy shortcomings is their use of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. Auditors found that Cleveland has not sufficiently used the LIHTC, which was also a finding of the Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Taskforce. In particular, Cleveland has not leveraged the LIHTC to promote mixed-income or affordable housing developments outside of poor neighborhoods. None of Cleveland's LIHTC-supported projects were in neighborhoods with less than twenty percent poverty, whereas sixty percent of the projects were in areas of concentrated poverty.<sup>193</sup> While some housing development in high poverty areas can be beneficial, if poor Cleveland residents can only find affordable housing in concentrated poverty areas, then they are likely to fall victim to the self-reinforcing nature of poverty and the double burden of concentrated poverty.

Cleveland adopted a set of goals and strategies regarding affordable housing as part of their "Connecting Cleveland 2020 Plan." These include solutions for decent and affordable housing, development incentives, and land-use strategies.<sup>194</sup> However, Cleveland's 2020 Plan was adopted in 2008, and not much has been done to support or implement its recommendations. With only four years remaining, it seems unlikely that Cleveland will meet many of its goals.

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<sup>190</sup> Alessandro Coppola.

<sup>191</sup> Stephan Whitaker, Thomas James Fitzpatrick IV.

<sup>192</sup> "A Successful Stabilization Response for the Present: A Strategic Development Catalyst for the Future," Cuyahoga County Land Revitalization Corporation, 2013, 12.

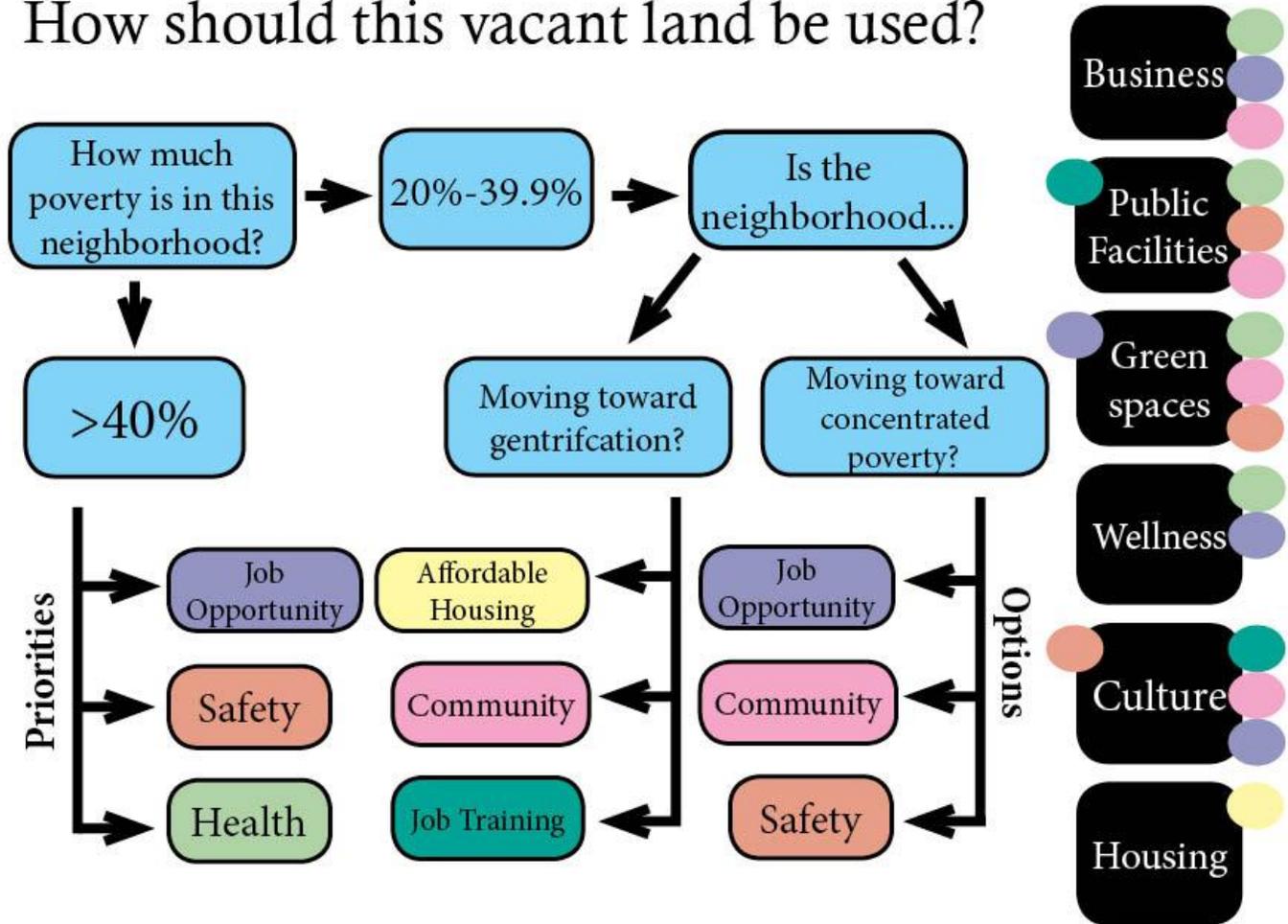
<sup>193</sup> Rachel Dissell. "Not enough low-income housing is being built in better neighborhoods, report finds," *Cleveland*, 18 August 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Cleveland City Planning Commission, "Connecting Cleveland: 2020 Citywide Plan," Accessed 20 September 2016, <http://planning.city.cleveland.oh.us/cwp/planIntro.php>.

One of the helpful lessons for policymakers is not just to voice the correct priorities, but also to enact them.

Vacant Land Placemaking Policy

# How should this vacant land be used?



Our recommendation consists of a decision tree that aims to guide Pittsburgh city officials and community members toward the most efficient and beneficial use of vacant land in high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods. The first factor our tree considers is the level of poverty in a neighborhood. We draw a firm distinction between concentrated poverty neighborhoods, where forty percent or more of the residents live in poverty, and high poverty neighborhoods, where twenty to forty percent of residents live in poverty. These two types of neighborhoods have distinct needs due to their different treatment by the government and by private investors. While neighborhoods in concentrated poverty are often considered too desolate to be recoverable, neighborhoods in high poverty are often prime hubs for new housing and

business development, as investors are drawn in by low property values and perhaps a diversifying population. Given these trends, we make a further distinction between high poverty neighborhoods in the process of gentrifying, and therefore at risk of displacing low-income residents, and high poverty neighborhoods in the process of declining and at risk of falling into concentrated poverty. Distinguishing community types along these lines is critical because the socioeconomic outlook of a neighborhood dictates its development priorities regarding vacant and abandoned properties.

The development priorities we have assigned to the three neighborhood types have been informed by our study of the characteristics of gentrifying, declining, and, most importantly, concentrated poverty neighborhoods. For each of these three categories of poor neighborhoods, our decision tree recommends a focus on three benefit types that should be prioritized for that neighborhood's needs. For our purposes, "benefits" are defined as features of a healthy and vibrant mixed-income neighborhood that can be promoted by city policy. For gentrifying high poverty neighborhoods, these three benefits are affordable housing, community, and job training. For declining high poverty neighborhoods, they are health, safety, and job opportunities. For concentrated poverty neighborhoods, the three benefits we recommend prioritizing are job opportunities, community, and safety.

Given these priorities, the decision tree guides decision-makers to several options for the use of vacant land. The options we recommend for vacant land use fall into six categories: business, public facilities, green spaces, wellness, culture, and affordable housing. Each of these categories represents a set of tangible actions city planners can take in collaboration with the community to reduce high and concentrated poverty.

We prioritized benefits for neighborhood types based upon the most pressing needs of each neighborhood. While all neighborhoods in poverty could be improved by all of these benefits, our decision tree recognizes that limited resources necessitate the prioritization of certain community needs over others. Community members in high poverty neighborhoods experiencing signs of gentrification have vastly different priorities than those in impoverished neighborhoods that are not experiencing influxes of investment and population. The general intent of policies for gentrifying neighborhoods should be avoiding the displacement of low income residents and allowing them to benefit from new investment. Meanwhile, policy related to declining neighborhoods should focus on stabilization and revitalization, and policy related to

concentrated poverty neighborhoods should prioritize improving residents' quality of life with the more long-term goal of encouraging new investment.

In gentrifying neighborhoods, our top priority is the creation of affordable housing as a vital preemptive measure to prevent the displacement of low-income residents by rising property values. Of next priority is community, because gentrification, which displaces both people and community, often risks erasing and whitewashing a neighborhood's sense of identity. Gentrification often causes people to feel that their neighborhood and its character are under attack. The third priority we recommend is job training because, while unemployment is not as high in gentrifying neighborhoods as in concentrated poverty neighborhoods, gentrification often brings in more and higher income employment opportunities that residents could benefit from with specialized job training. Job training would allow the local community to capitalize on the influx of investment and population to their neighborhood. Gentrification will create new service and retail opportunities as well as provide the potential for low-income residents to join Pittsburgh's flourishing medical, educational, and technical industries. If policy keeps these priorities in mind, neighborhood benefits could be inclusive for all residents.

The first priority for declining neighborhoods is job opportunities. With widespread poverty, attracting money into neighborhoods would promote local business expansion and increase neighborhood job opportunities. Vacant land in these neighborhoods could be used to expand job opportunities to generate economic stabilization and revitalization, hopefully spurring new waves of investment. Similar to gentrifying neighborhoods, our second priority in declining neighborhoods is community. A vibrant community signals that a struggling neighborhood still has value worth the capital required by maintenance and investment. A strong sense of community helps ensure residents take responsibility and care for their neighborhood. Fostering community compassion and involvement helps keep wealthy neighborhood residents from seeking relocation in reaction to the increasing signs of distress, and encourages investment from businesses and individuals looking to relocate to an affordable area with character as well as many more far-reaching impacts. Providing opportunities through vacant land that preserves that sense of community will help keep neighborhoods and social networks in contact. Finally, our third priority recommendation for declining neighborhoods is safety. How safe someone feels in their neighborhood is integral to their quality of life. While high poverty neighborhoods with low crime rates have a great deal of investment potential, similar neighborhoods with higher

crime rates will attract few stabilization and revitalization opportunities. In addition to the importance of protecting residents, news of violent crime can be incredibly damaging to the reputation of an already struggling neighborhood, disincentivizing development and accelerating decline. If these three benefits guide vacant land policy in declining neighborhoods, neighborhoods can be stabilized and revitalized.

Concentrated poverty neighborhoods are often given the least development and mortgage loan investment, even while residents in these neighborhoods often live disparately difficult lives. In response to this distressing trend, we hope to persuade policymakers and investors that vacant land, which is common in impoverished areas, can be an effective way to reinvest in low-income neighborhoods. Just like in declining neighborhoods, the benefit of greatest importance to concentrated poverty neighborhoods is job opportunities. Jobs are notoriously difficult to access in these communities due to a combination of lack of local businesses and lack of public transportation. Attracting job growth is next to impossible in areas of concentrated poverty, but vacant land can be utilized in a myriad of ways to help bring jobs into these neighborhoods. Our second priority for concentrated poverty neighborhoods is safety, as the association of these neighborhoods with violent crime both threatens the wellbeing of residents and heightens public perception that the neighborhood is unsalvageable. Concentrated poverty neighborhoods often have the highest crime rates, causing residents to be fearful of the streets they live on, which has many negative impacts on quality of life. The third priority for concentrated poverty neighborhoods is health, a direct response to the disturbingly low health outcomes displayed in residents. Concentrated poverty neighborhoods often experience far less access to healthy living options than even slightly less impoverished neighborhoods, but there are vacant land use options to help correct for this disparity. Given how important and costly health maintenance is, expanding opportunities for low-income residents to stay fit are integral to the overall health of a community. With Pittsburgh amidst an economic rise, policymakers could make use of vacant land to ensure concentrated poverty neighborhoods are included in the expanding city economy.

Our decision tree, and the following detailed descriptions of potential vacant land uses, should guide city policy-makers to the best use of an underutilized resource for combating high and concentrated poverty. Finally, we once again emphasize the idea that this decision tree is not intended to prescribe treatments to impoverished communities, but to serve as a tool for those

communities to better understand their options and collaborate with the city government to improve their neighborhoods as they judge appropriate.

The first step to using the decision tree is to determine the average level of poverty in the relevant neighborhood. If the neighborhood struggles with concentrated poverty, follow the tree immediately to the list of three benefits that should be prioritized. If the neighborhood is in high poverty, next determine whether that neighborhood is in the process of gentrifying or declining. Though this is a more subjective judgment than average poverty level, it can be determined through the analysis of several indicative factors, such as recent trends in the neighborhood's property values, business openings and closures, progress of future development plans, and the average income of exiting and arriving residents. For example, the neighborhood might be judged gentrifying if over a five-year period property values have risen, new medium- and high-end businesses such as Whole Foods have opened,<sup>195</sup> and the rate of middle-income residents moving in has increased at the same time as the rate of new low-income residents has stalled or declined. Meanwhile, a declining neighborhood might display falling property values, failing businesses, decreasing development interest, and the increasing departure of more wealthy residents.

Once the neighborhood has been deemed gentrifying or declining, follow the tree in either case to the list of benefits to be prioritized for that neighborhood type. After reaching the list of benefits, note the color of that benefit type; we have color-coded the actionable policy options listed on the tree according to the benefits that each action would provide for a neighborhood. For example, if a neighborhood is in concentrated poverty and policymakers wish to promote the tree's first priority benefit of "Job Opportunities," which is coded purple, policymakers should locate the policy options that are correspondingly coded purple: namely, business, green spaces, wellness, and culture. The color-coding system has the additional feature of easily pointing policymakers toward the policy options that would promote the most benefits for their neighborhood type. For example, establishing a green space in a concentrated poverty neighborhood would meet all three of that neighborhood's prioritized benefits with a single action. We devote most of the remainder of this document to providing policymakers with more

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<sup>195</sup> Mark Belko, "Whole Foods to Build Second Market in East Liberty, This Time at Penn Plaza Site," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 27 July 2016.

detail on how each policy option would meet its related benefits, and how each directly relates to the worst impacts of living in high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods.

### **Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing is a vital feature of any sustainable mixed-income community. If a gentrifying community lacks enough affordable housing units to sustain its low-income population, much of that population will likely be priced out of that neighborhood, placing those residents at an even greater risk of suffering the consequences of living in concentrated poverty. The negative impacts of inadequate affordable housing are perhaps best represented by the “Moving to Opportunity” (MTO) experiment, one of the largest and longest-term studies of the effects of concentrated poverty on individuals. MTO was a 1994 New York City social experiment sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Development (HUD). Over 4,600 families living in high-poverty public housing volunteered to be sorted into three groups: a control group received no housing vouchers and no relocation; a regular Section 8 group received affordable housing vouchers with no counseling; and an experimental group received affordable housing vouchers with counseling and were relocated to low-poverty neighborhoods. In the short term, drawing from data two years post relocation, the experimental group reported twenty percent reduction in distress and depression symptoms and an eight to thirty-three percent mental health improvement overall, with children showing more improvement than adults.<sup>196</sup>

A long term analysis of the data, collected at least ten years post relocation, produced even more conclusive evidence of the lasting negative effect concentrated poverty has on children. This analysis revealed a sharp distinction between children who were younger than thirteen years at the time of relocation versus children older than thirteen years. The younger group demonstrated an eighty percent increase in high school graduation rates for black children and a sixty percent increase for non-black children, as well as higher college attendance rates and a thirty-one percent higher annual income. This group was also less likely to become single parents and more likely to remain in low or medium income neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the older group of children — adolescents at the time of relocation — experienced little to no long-term positive results, and indeed a neutralization of short-term positive results.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Tama Leventhal and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, “Moving to Opportunity: An Experimental Study of Neighborhood Effects on Mental Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 9 (2003).

This sharp distinction between the effects of relocation on young children and adolescents indicates the limits of Section 8 and similar housing voucher programs that involve displacement, which can often negatively affect mental health by disturbing pre-existing social and job networks. Overall, the MTO experiment suggests that the negative effects of concentrated poverty compound over time, and that long-term exposure to better neighborhoods is crucial to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. The main takeaway from the MTO experiment seems to be that efforts to combat concentrated poverty that create mixed income communities are positive, but displacement of low-income families is more often negative. Affordable housing is crucial to facilitating mixed-income communities without displacing residents.

### *Housing*

City-owned vacant land can be used for the construction of new low-income housing. This course of action is most advisable in high-poverty areas currently experiencing or about to experience gentrification. The addition of low-income housing in such areas mitigates against the displacement caused by rising rents and property taxes. There is a plethora of other benefits as well. It is well known that constructing affordable housing is cost intensive.

One of the largest impacts of affordable housing is increased wellbeing. Families who spend less than thirty percent of their income on housing and are not constantly under threat of displacement live vastly healthier lives than those who are frequently forced to move.<sup>198</sup> A recent study of over 8,000 primarily low-income urban students in Tennessee found that for every residential move before second grade, students' math and reading test scores dropped relative to their peers.<sup>199</sup> This is especially concerning because the study also showed that poorer children were much more likely to move multiple times, compared to their more advantaged peers. The problem of changing homes is compounded by the frequent attendant need to change schools. Researchers have shown that changing schools results in a decrease in math and reading achievement for elementary school children, equivalent to a three to four-month learning

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<sup>197</sup> Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Lawrence F. Katz, "The Effects of Exposure to Better Neighborhoods on Children: New Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment," *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, May 2015, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21156>.

<sup>198</sup> "How Housing Matters: The Housing Crisis Continues to Loom Large in the Experiences and Attitudes of the American Public," MacArthur Foundation, April 2014.

<sup>199</sup> "Impact of Affordable Housing on Families and Communities: A Review of the Evidence Base," Enterprise Community Partners, 2014.

disadvantage. This issue is serious insofar as it is a major contributor to the perpetuation of poverty, preventing those who are raised in poverty from receiving the education necessary to escape poverty.<sup>200</sup> Additionally, poor families make sacrifices, such as taking on a second job, leaving less time to spend with their children, cutting back on healthcare, and accumulating credit card debt, at a higher rate than well-off families. Figure 2 is a powerful representation of the sacrifices that affect the health of impoverished children.<sup>201</sup>

There is also substantial evidence that the addition of low-income housing into a high poverty neighborhood can revitalize the area’s economy. Every hundred low-income housing units generates approximately \$7.9 million in local income in the first year and \$2.4 million annually after; 122 local jobs are created in the first year and thirty annually after; and \$827,000 in taxes is generated in the first year and \$441,000 annually after that.<sup>202</sup> In addition to economic growth, new low income housing generates an average of 6.5 percent decrease in street crime.<sup>203</sup> As displayed by this evidence, affordable housing has a profound effect on areas where it is established.

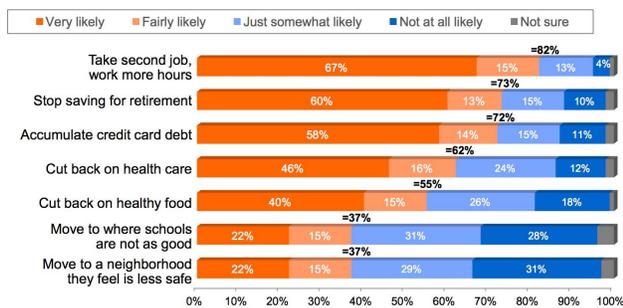
Placing affordable housing in an area of concentrated poverty is the best way to jumpstart such a community. Affordable housing fosters personal wellbeing among residents, while simultaneously boosting the local economy by providing job opportunities. In addition to these benefits, affordable housing allows children to stay in the same location and receive an education that would otherwise be hindered by frequent moves.

## Community

High and concentrated poverty can lead to less culturally vibrant, less politically and socially involved, and less harmonious communities. High and concentrated poverty can

**The public has a clear understanding of the tradeoffs that too often have to be made by people and families who are struggling to maintain their housing.**

*If a family with two children is struggling to afford to stay in their home, how likely do you think they would be to make the following tradeoffs in order to pay their rent or mortgage?*



<sup>200</sup> “Impact of Affordable Housing on Families and Communities: A Review of the Evidence Base.”

<sup>201</sup> “How Housing Matters: The Housing Crisis Continues to Loom Large in the Experiences and Attitudes of the American Public,” MacArthur Foundation, April 2014.

<sup>202</sup> “Impact of Affordable Housing on Families and Communities: A Review of the Evidence Base.”

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

accelerate the decline and block the recovery of already struggling neighborhoods, often creating segregated pockets of poverty surrounded by more affluent neighborhoods.<sup>204</sup> Income and racial segregation may in turn discourage communication and collaboration between neighbors and heighten classist or racist prejudices.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, the social isolation and hopelessness associated with high and concentrated poverty have been shown to increase political apathy, especially in predominantly black communities.<sup>206</sup> Political disengagement in high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods can weaken the clout of whole cities.

These harmful effects are felt most by already marginalized groups. The people who are most negatively impacted by concentrated poverty are themselves low-income. While not everyone who lives in a concentrated poverty neighborhood is low-income, poor people living in poor neighborhoods face a double burden.<sup>207</sup> Low-income households in high-poverty neighborhoods have a much lower median net worth than low-income families in low-poverty neighborhoods; the latter also have more savings, are almost twice as likely to be homeowners, and their homes have almost triple the median value.<sup>208</sup> Low-income people of color are disproportionately impacted.<sup>209</sup> African American and Hispanic poor people are more than twice as likely to live in concentrated poverty as poor white people, contributing to a culture in which poor predominantly Black or Hispanic neighborhoods are much more common than poor white neighborhoods.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, households in high poverty neighborhoods are almost four times as likely to be single-parent households than those in low poverty; many of these single parents are young, unemployed women of color.<sup>211</sup> The other side of this coin is that poor Black and Hispanic children are more likely to live in concentrated poverty than poor Black and Hispanic adults; strikingly, these results are reversed for poor white children, who are less likely to live in

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<sup>204</sup> Paul Duggan, “Study: D.C. Gentrification Can Cause Pockets of Poverty to Grow, especially East of Anacostia River,” *The Washington Post*, 23 November 2016.

<sup>205</sup> Miles Hewstone, Nicole Tausch, Joanne Hughes, Ed Cairns, “Prejudice, Intergroup Contact and Identity: Do Neighborhoods Matter?” in *Identity, Ethnic Diversity, and Community Cohesion* (2007).

<sup>206</sup> Yvette Alex-Assensoh, “Race, Concentrated Poverty, Social Isolation, and Political Behavior.”

<sup>207</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, “The Growth and Spread of Concentrated Poverty, 2000 to 2008-2012,” *Brookings Institution*, 31 July 2014.

<sup>208</sup> The Pew Charitable Trust, “Neighborhood Poverty and Household Financial Security,” 28 January 2016.

<sup>209</sup> Yvette Alex-Assensoh, “Race, Concentrated Poverty, Social Isolation, and Political Behavior,” *Urban Affairs Review* 33, no. 2 (November 1997): 209-227.

<sup>210</sup> Daniel T. Lichter, Domenico Parisi, and Michael C. Taquino, “The Geography of Exclusion: Race, Segregation, and Concentrated Poverty,” *Social Problems* 59, no. 3 (2012): 364-88.

<sup>211</sup> The Pew Charitable Trust, “Neighborhood Poverty and Household Financial Security,” 28 January 2016.

concentrated poverty than poor white adults.<sup>212</sup> Overall, stronger communities empower residents and improve their quality of life.

### *Business*

Businesses are essential parts of a socially well-functioning community. Ideally, the “Main Street” of a neighborhood is its backyard, a vibrant and welcoming place where all residents can gather to shop for necessities, find entertainment, and connect with neighbors. Grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, and restaurants are essential to building livable, well-functioning communities.<sup>213</sup> The presence of such businesses that serve residents’ direct needs can help form the impression of a “complete” neighborhood. A study done by PolicyLink in cooperation with the Food Trust revealed that major grocery stores can serve as a catalyst for the entry of new businesses, helping to revitalize the neighborhood as a whole.<sup>214</sup> While large chain stores can meet residents’ basic needs for food and pharmaceuticals, locally-owned small businesses represent and uphold the core identity of a community. From cozy coffee shops to friendly corner barber to novelty shops offering one-of-a-kind wares, locally-owned businesses build a unique community vibe that both attracts and retains residents. Locally-owned businesses also tend to facilitate relationships with and between customers, host social activities, and advocate for issues of relevance to the community. For example, Everyday Cafe was recently founded in Homewood by Reverend John M. Wallace, Jr. in partnership with Operation Better Block and the Bible Center Church.<sup>215</sup> Wallace aims for his cafe to be a “social enterprise,” providing free internet service, hosting cultural events after hours, and hopefully funding social programs for residents.<sup>216</sup> Businesses like Everyday Cafe can be a positive symbol of community revitalization for many residents. All neighborhood-serving businesses, chain and local, can restore to residents a sense of ownership and pride over their own community. When residents do not have to travel to meet their material and social needs, they can feel more confident in the self-sufficiency and sustainability of their community.

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<sup>212</sup> Paul Jargowsky, “Architecture of Segregation: Civil Unrest, the Concentration of Poverty, and Public Policy,” *The Century Foundation*, 07 August 2015.

<sup>213</sup> Rebecca Flournoy, “Healthy Foods, Strong Communities,” National Housing Institute.

<sup>214</sup> Allison Karpyn, Sarah Treauhaft, “The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters.”

<sup>215</sup> Bob Bauder, “Homewood Cafe Hopes to Create Bridge Between Neighborhoods,” *Trib Live*, 28 November 2016.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

Locally-owned businesses enrich communities by increasing the neighborhood's tax base and preventing profits from draining out of neighborhood. Businesses pay income, property, and employment taxes to the local government, much of which can fund public projects to benefit the community. Additionally, small business owners are incentivized to patronize other locally-owned businesses in order to maintain personal connections and build professional relationships, thereby increasing the amount of business revenue that is eventually funneled back into the community. Several studies have found that locally-owned businesses recirculate a much larger percentage of revenue locally than comparable chain retailers. Civic Economics' study of this trend in Austin, Texas, demonstrated that an independent bookshop returned more than three times as much money to the local economy as a Borders chain bookstore.<sup>217</sup> Another study conducted by the Institute of Local Self-Reliance in Maine found that forty-eight percent of every sale at locally-owned businesses was recirculated within the community, compared to under fourteen percent at chains.<sup>218</sup> Locally-owned businesses also tend to use space more efficiently; a New Orleans study found that they generated nearly four times the return to the local economy per square foot as the major chain Target.<sup>219</sup> Overall, chains and especially local businesses promote community by giving people a unique, vibrant place to gather socially, meet their material needs, and spend money that will ultimately flow back to the community.

### *Culture*

The primary benefit of creating cultural spaces is the strengthened sense of community and local identity. Artists that are given spaces and resources to create are able to network and collaborate with others. Not only does this lead to the creation of a cultural hub within a specific neighborhood, it also attracts additional artists to the area. In turn, a growing artistic community and the attendant networking that goes along with it helps to create a sense of community and local identity among residents.

Although there are few empirical studies that quantify the relationship between cultural developments and neighborhood improvement, the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP), a research group at the University of Pennsylvania, attempted to apply empirical methods in order to understand the broader socio-economic impacts of the arts in urban areas. Through their

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<sup>217</sup> "Thinking Outside the Box," *The Urban Conservancy*, September 2009.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

collaboration with The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), a community development financial institution, SIAP's research on Philadelphia neighborhoods in the 1980s and 1990s shows that low-income neighborhoods were three to four times more likely to revitalize if they had cultural outlets or participants, as compared to other low-income/at-risk communities.<sup>220</sup> SIAP connects cultural engagement to the decline of poverty, as cultural production causes an increase in community participation. Additionally, they find that cultural engagement bridges community divides of geography, ethnicity, and social class. Thus, cultural development has several social benefits that will positively impact the community.

### *Green Spaces*

Green spaces are frequently associated with higher rates of neighborhood satisfaction.<sup>221</sup> Stabilization and basic beautification efforts, like demolishing a vacant structure and planting high-canopy trees, generally make people feel more safe and stress free, enabling them to better appreciate their community. Green spaces can provide infrastructure for successful community activities like after-school programs, recreational sports leagues, and public events.

In particular, community gardens provide residents with a strong sense of community. Even in gardens with plot separation, most community gardens are environments where participants share things from knowledge to tools. At eighty-seven percent of community gardens residents cooperate, providing them with more social ties and a greater sense of neighborhood appreciation.<sup>222</sup> Community gardens attract plots owned by groups with large social infrastructures like schools and churches, which help legitimize the sense of community created by gardens.<sup>223</sup> By providing a physical meeting place, social ties, and a neighborhood goal, community gardens can be particularly important in low-income neighborhoods, where it is less likely features exist that provide similar opportunities instill a strong sense of community.

This sense of community increases community desirability and residents' sense of permanence.<sup>224</sup> Even slight greening efforts can lead to an increased sense of community

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<sup>220</sup> Stern, Mark J., Susan C. Seifert, "From Creative Economy to Creative Society," *GIA Reader*.

<sup>221</sup> Megan Heckert, Jeremy Mennis, "The Economic Impact of Greening Urban Vacant Land: A Spatial Difference-In-Differences Analysis," *Environment and Planning* 44, 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Gardening Matters, "Multiple Benefits of Community Gardening," 2012.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Within a year, a property in a low-income submarket adjacent to a community garden was valued 6.2 percent higher than comparable properties not near a garden; the effect was only 4.1 percent in a higher income neighborhood. For both neighborhoods, the benefit increases over time. Five years after the addition of a garden,

permanence: in neighborhoods with less than ten percent tree-cover, residents were more likely to stay in the area for a short duration.<sup>225</sup> A study in St. Louis found homeownership rates increase in the vicinity of the garden—a sign that they give residents a sense of permanence that could be very useful in high poverty neighborhoods that are negatively trending.<sup>226</sup> The sense of community green spaces and particularly community gardens provide can be very valuable for neighborhoods trying to retain their population, those trying to attract new residents, and those trying to improve the quality of life of current residents.

### *Public Facilities*

The Pittsburgh City Government can support several public uses of vacant land that will increase a sense of community identity and civic participation. For each of the possible options, the function that public space can best serve in terms of community building is providing space for people to gather. Libraries, parks and recreation facilities, community centers, and even police storefronts can create space for community members to come together. Public spaces can be used to host public meetings and events, or as safe informal gathering places for youth and adults. Additionally, such spaces help build new aspects of community identity, because they can incubate small business development, new arts projects, and other initiatives that grow communities.<sup>227</sup>

### **Job Opportunity**

High unemployment is a tell-tale sign of the decreased economic mobility faced by residents of high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods. When poverty climbs and property values decline, local businesses suffer and outsiders are disincentivized to invest in and develop the neighborhood — a feedback loop that serves only to exacerbate and spread poverty. Lower economic mobility in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty is indicated by factors such as

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property values in the vicinity of a garden were valued 9.4 percent higher than comparable properties in low-income areas in the Bronx, NY; in higher, income areas, the effect was only 7 percent.

Ioan Voicu, Vicki Been, “The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values,” *Real Estate Economics* 36, no.2 (2008).

<sup>225</sup> Kirsten M. M. Beyer, Andrea Kaltenbach, Aniko Szabo, Sandra Bogar, F. Javier Nieto, Kristen M. Malecki, “Exposure to Neighborhood Green Space and Mental Health: Evidence from the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 11, no. 3, 2014.

<sup>226</sup> Ioan Voicu, Vicki Been.

<sup>227</sup> Nicole Steffan et al., “Public Libraries: A Wise Investment,” Denver, CO: Library Research Service, 2009, Accessed 01 November 2016, [https://www.lrs.org/documents/closer\\_look/roi.pdf](https://www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/roi.pdf).

inadequate schools, job inaccessibility, financial instability, and a general attitude of hopelessness and inertia.

Insufficient educational opportunities translate into insufficient employment opportunities. Concentrated poverty neighborhoods often lack sufficient local jobs to sustain the population, as well as adequate public transportation to facilitate non-local jobs.<sup>228</sup> High unemployment and low job security translates in turn to weaker job-seeking social networks, as already marginalized residents are reluctant to put their livelihood at risk by recommending a job opening to a friend or family member.<sup>229</sup> Ultimately, concentrated poverty deals a harsh blow to financial stability. People living in concentrated poverty are more likely to experience material hardship and debt, and less likely to have any of the usual signifiers of an adult financial “profile,” such as a college savings account, a mortgage, a checking account, or a credit card.<sup>230</sup> Regardless of income level, individuals living in concentrated poverty perceive their financial security as significantly worse than people living in more affluent areas.<sup>231</sup> Overall, low-income individuals living in concentrated poverty experience countless impediments to their ability to succeed in the job market, making it much more difficult for them to rise out of poverty.

### *Business*

One of the more immediate benefits witnessed after new businesses are placed in a neighborhood is the increase in job employment opportunities. Not only do more and larger businesses have a strong positive correlation to economic growth and decreased poverty, but the presence of successful businesses in a neighborhood creates a feedback loop, encouraging more private investment in those neighborhoods.<sup>232</sup> Larger businesses like supermarket chains, are havens for various employment opportunities with positions for a wide range of applicants. For example, Pennsylvania’s Fresh Food Financing Initiative created over 5,000 jobs by placing eighty-eight supermarkets in recognized food deserts throughout the state.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> National Household Travel Survey, “FHWA NHTS Brief: Mobility Challenges for Households in Poverty,” 2014, Accessed 06 December 2016, <http://nhts.ornl.gov/briefs/PovertyBrief.pdf>.

<sup>229</sup> Lindsay Hamm and Steve McDonald, “Helping Hands: Race, Neighborhood Context, and Reluctance in Providing Job-Finding Assistance,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>230</sup> The Pew Charitable Trust, “Neighborhood Poverty and Household Financial Security.”

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Gebremariam, Gebremedhin, & Jackson, *West Virginia University*, 2004

<sup>233</sup> Dwight Evans, “Report on Key Issues from the House Appropriations Committee: Budget Briefing,” 04 March 2010, Accessed 06 December 2016, [http://www.ncsl.org/documents/labor/workingfamilies/PA\\_FFFI.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org/documents/labor/workingfamilies/PA_FFFI.pdf).

While large chain stores may create a heavy demand for employees, the additional presence of locally-owned businesses may generate even more jobs overall. A study of New Orleans revealed that a ten percent shift of consumer purchasing from chain stores to locally-owned businesses generated \$235 million more in local economic activity — more than twice that of chains — as well as more than 1,600 jobs generating \$53 million in wages.<sup>234</sup> The National Bureau of Economic Research has additionally found that young businesses, or start-ups, may be an even greater contributor to the job market, creating twenty percent of all new jobs in a twelve-year period.<sup>235</sup> Overall, businesses are an important source of job creation and economic growth in high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods.

### *Culture*

Cultural spaces add economic benefits to the community, seen most clearly through the creation of new markets, new uses of previous facilities, and new jobs. For example, the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh created forty-two full-time jobs and 108 part-time jobs. Its operating budget consists of \$5.4 million, with an additional \$5 million spent in the Pittsburgh area due to the creation of this museum.<sup>236</sup> Although smaller neighborhoods in Pittsburgh will not have the financial resources or enough vacant land to create a similar cultural space, this example simply shows the impact of museums on job creation and economic productivity.

However, cultural spaces often entail other economic impacts. The establishment or addition of art museums in four urban areas resulted in the increase of residential property values. The properties near the museum experienced the largest increases, with estimates extending from one to over twenty kilometers from the museum site.<sup>237</sup> Here, the creation of an educational space, specifically seen through the museums, positively impacted the quality of life in the respective neighborhoods. It is important to note, however, that this is not entirely cost-free. Rising property values can also result in gentrification and decreased affordable housing. The pursuit of such installations should therefore be approached with a conscious effort to ensure shared benefits to the community that will not displace local residents.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> “Thinking Outside the Box,” *The Urban Conservancy*, September 2009.

<sup>235</sup> John C. Haltiwanger, Ron S. Jarmin, Javier Miranda, “Who Creates Jobs? Small vs. Large vs. Young,” *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 2013, 347-361.

<sup>236</sup> “Fact Sheet,” *The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh*.

<sup>237</sup> Stephen Sheppard, “Measuring the Economic and Social Impacts of Cultural Organizations,” *Williams College Community Development Investment Review*.

## *Green Spaces*

Green spaces have direct and indirect benefits on local employment. In 2015, Pittsburgh's park agency employed 260 non-seasonal employees, about 8.5 out of every 10,000 Pittsburghers.<sup>239</sup> This figure compares favorably with other comparable cities like Cleveland (5.5), Portland (6.7), and St. Louis (7.1).<sup>240</sup> However, Pittsburgh still has room to grow: 21.8 of every 10,000 Washington D.C. residents work for the city's park agency and, more comparably, that number for Cincinnati is 14.4.<sup>241</sup> Non-profits can boost employment through both parks and community gardens. For example, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, a local non-profit, spends almost \$5 million annually on maintaining eight area parks, a large influx of capital—much of which goes directly to employees.<sup>242</sup> Green spaces, especially community gardens, can also directly alter individual's employment through agricultural education and entrepreneurship opportunities.<sup>243</sup> New green spaces can make new opportunities available that directly impact individual's likelihood of employment.

The indirect effect of green space on employment, however, can be even more powerful. Small and large businesses alike, especially tech companies, list access to green space as a top priority in picking their location.<sup>244</sup> That is a major reason so many companies have relocated to Portland, Oregon, where there are 24.2 acres of parkland per resident.<sup>245</sup> Portland established restrictions that limited developments outside the city in 1980, a controversial policy that ended up helping raise metropolitan area jobs by fifty-seven percent by 1999. Companies like HewlettPackard, Intel, and Hyundai were attracted to the wealth of green space that lay just outside the urban environment.<sup>246</sup> 2010 data for Pittsburgh shows the number of parkland acres per 1,000 residents is less than half of Portland's at only 10.1, which is higher than some Rust Belt cities like Detroit (6.5), Cleveland (7.2), and Buffalo (8.0), but lower than others like

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Peter Harnik, Abby Martin, Kyle Barnhart, "2015 City Park Facts," *The Trust for Public Land*, April 2015.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Project Ever Green, "Economic Benefits of Green Spaces," Accessed 04 December 2016, <https://projectevergreen.org/resources/economic-benefits-of-green-spaces/>.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Peter Harnik, Abby Martin, Kyle Barnhart, "2015 City Park Facts."

<sup>246</sup> Steve Lerner, William Poole, "The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space," *The Trust for Public Land*, 1999.

Columbus (14.8) and Cincinnati (20.5).<sup>247</sup> One effective way to increase green space with low maintenance costs, is side-lot programs, which have proven to be most effective at the fiftieth percentile of median house income and vacancy rate. In areas that are too distressed, side-yards alone will not attract new businesses, and in higher-income neighborhoods, side-yards do little to increase a property's already high desirability.<sup>248</sup> Like parks, community gardens, and the presence of stabilized lots with greening features such as trees, have also proven to be a factor for small businesses looking to relocate.

After greening attract businesses, greening features can help businesses prosper. Consumers are more likely to visit a retail store around greening features. They are also willing to pay nine to twelve percent more for the same product if it is sold in a shopping area with trees.<sup>249</sup> Following renovations to Washington, D.C.'s Meridian Hill Park in the early 1990s, visitation to the park tripled, and it is still a tourist attraction to this day. Restaurants and retail stores continue to provide employment opportunities to the neighborhood.<sup>250</sup> When greening features are present, consumers rate customer service, merchant helpfulness, and product quality higher, meaning they are more likely to re-patronize the business.<sup>251</sup> Employers are justifiably attracted to areas that have stable, green lots available for development and permanent greening features in the neighborhood like parks and gardens, because they lead to prosperous businesses and lasting employment opportunities.

### *Wellness*

Wellness spaces, such as hospitals and community health clinics, increase job opportunities in a community through both direct and indirect means. Directly, wellness spaces can offer a breadth and variety of jobs to local residents; indirectly, wellness spaces attract investment into communities, thus increasing the overall economic wellbeing of the area and its residents. Communities devoid of wellness spaces tend to be, on average, less economically

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<sup>247</sup> Peter Harnik, Abby Martin, Kyle Barnhart, "2015 City Park Facts."

<sup>248</sup> Joanna P. Ganning, J. Rosie Tighe, "Assessing the Feasibility of Side Yard Programs as a Solution to Land Vacancy in U.S. Shrinking Cities," *Urban Affairs Review* 1, no.18 (2014).

<sup>249</sup> Kathleen L. Wolf, "Economics and Public Value of Urban Forests," *Urban Agriculture Magazine* 13, December 2004.

<sup>250</sup> Will Rogers, "The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space," *The Trust for Public Land*.

<sup>251</sup> Kathleen L. Wolf.

well-off and less healthy than communities of comparable size and demographics that have wellness spaces to take advantage of.

Creating hospitals in underserved communities is a large expenditure that must be undertaken with care and concern for the origin of initial investment and the impact on surrounding community. However, the economic benefits hospitals bring to their communities is undeniable. The presence of a hospital in a community can create trust and inspire investment, increasing the ‘attractiveness’ and thus indirectly affecting the overall level of economic activity in the area.<sup>252</sup> These indirect economic impacts can be extremely beneficial, especially for communities that struggle to achieve direct investment into their area. In addition to indirect economic benefits, hospitals also contribute to the economic strength of their communities by acting as large employers. In many high-poverty areas throughout the United States, the area hospital acts as the largest employer.<sup>253</sup> Through these two economic benefits, increasing investment and stimulating employment, hospitals can contribute fiscally to the communities in which they reside.

Community Health Clinics can have similar economic repercussions in their own communities. In 2009, health centers generated approximately \$20 billion in economic activity for their local communities.<sup>254</sup> In addition to investment, community health centers also increase employment in underserved communities by employing local citizens to maintain the operations of the health centers. Through stimulating both economic investment and job growth, as can be seen, wellness centers can have a large net positive benefit for the communities that they serve.

## **Job Training**

One of the main impacts of concentrated poverty on individuals involves obstacles on the traditional pathway from education to career. These obstacles begin to accumulate in earliest childhood, with a lack of nursery, daycare, and recreational programs.<sup>255</sup> Once in school, many low-income black children are disadvantaged by “linguistic isolation;” they are more likely to

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<sup>252</sup> “Mayo with Everything: What Happens When a Clinic Takes Over a Metropolis,” *The Economist*, 21 February 2008.

<sup>253</sup> David Zuckerman, “Hospitals Building Healthier Communities,” *The Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland*, March 2013.

<sup>254</sup> Ellen-Marie Whelan, “The Importance of Community Health Centers: Engines of Economic Activity and Job Creation,” *Center for American Progress*, 09 August 2010.

<sup>255</sup> Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2001.

speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which despite its status as a linguistically valid dialect is disvalued in mainstream academia.<sup>256</sup> Greater exposure to neighborhood crime and violence often induces significant stress in low-income students that can distract from their studies,<sup>257</sup> and insufficient access to preventative healthcare increases their rates of absenteeism.<sup>258</sup> Additionally, children in concentrated poverty neighborhoods tend to have few college-educated adult role models for academic success, since their parents and members of their extended family network are less likely to have earned a higher degree. According to the PEW Cultural Trust, fifty-seven percent of adults in high poverty neighborhoods have received a high school diploma or less, compared to only twenty-seven percent of individuals in low-poverty neighborhoods, and eighty-three percent have not completed a bachelor's degree.<sup>259</sup> As low-income children continue through high school, they often demonstrate poorer academic performance and ambition, culminating in higher rates of truancy, delinquency, and finally dropouts.<sup>260</sup> One study found that long-term residence in concentrated poverty neighborhoods reduced the probability of high school graduation for non-black children from ninety-five to eighty-seven percent and for black children from ninety-six to seventy-six percent.<sup>261</sup> Unsurprisingly, low-income children in these neighborhoods also shows lower rates of college acceptance, enrollment, and graduation.<sup>262</sup>

We do not directly address formal schooling in this report, acknowledging that education policy is extremely complicated and largely outside the jurisdiction of the City government. Nevertheless, through our inclusion of the “Job Training” benefit, we hope to communicate the importance of education at every step along the school-to-career pathway. A majority of “welfare leavers” get minimum wage jobs with low or nonexistent benefits, and two-thirds of welfare recipients scored in the twenty-fifth percentile or lower of the Army Forces Qualifying Test, which measures basic skills in literacy, arithmetic, and reasoning.<sup>263</sup> Jobs that do not require an

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<sup>256</sup> Sampson, Sharkey, & Raudenbush, 2008.

<sup>257</sup> Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Burdick-Will et al., 2010; Farah et al., 2006.

<sup>258</sup> Aysola, Orav, & Ayanian, 2011; Starfield, 1997.

<sup>259</sup> The PEW Charitable Trusts. “Neighborhood Poverty and Household Financial Security.” 28 January 2016.

<sup>260</sup> Tama Leventhal, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, “The Neighborhoods They Live in: The Effects of Neighborhoods on Child and Adolescent Outcomes,” *Psychological Bulletin* 126, no. 2 (2000): 309-337.

<sup>261</sup> Geoffrey T. Wodtke, David J. Harding, and Felix Elwert, “Neighborhood Effects in Temporal Perspective: The Impact of Long-Term Exposure to Concentrated Disadvantage on High School Graduation,” *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 5 (October 2011): 713-736.

<sup>262</sup> Tama Leventhal and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, “Moving to Opportunity: An Experimental Study of Neighborhood Effects on Mental Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 9 (2003).

advanced education often nevertheless demand “hard” skills such as computer literacy and machine operation, and being hired for these jobs may be dependent on “soft” skills such as resume writing, job hunting, interviewing, and speaking English as a second language.<sup>264</sup> More widely available job training covering a wider range of skills may help residents to compensate for lack of advanced degrees, enhancing their competitiveness on the job market, opening doors to higher-paying positions, and increasing their chances of being hired, retained, and promoted. Sufficient job training may enable residents of poor neighborhoods to more easily make a family-supporting wage without a college or even high school degree, a promising step toward breaking the cycle of poverty.

### *Culture*

Cultural spaces can be used to improve institutions that are weak in the community, particularly educational institutions. One example of this is using cultural spaces to provide volunteer tutoring groups and afterschool classes. These spaces can serve to bolster areas that are traditionally lacking in an affordable way.

Cultural centers can easily double as spaces for job training in a community. These buildings can have multiple functions, serving as places to introduce community members to new skills to make them competitive in the changing job market, while also serving the cultural and community needs of other members in the neighborhood. When community development corporations (CDCs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) provide job training and placement programs to members of low-income communities, their comprehensive approach usually requires a base facility where the education and mentoring can occur. These facilities are relatively low cost and size, and therefore can be accommodated in most neighborhoods.

### *Public Facilities*

The Pittsburgh city government has several options for using public funds to pursue the benefit of increasing education within the community, particularly in regards to job training. One such option is to work with the Carnegie Library System to open a new branch if the neighborhood doesn’t already have one that most residents can easily access.<sup>265</sup> Expanding access

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<sup>263</sup> “Job Training and Education to Fight Poverty,” *Institute for Women’s Policy Research* (April 2002).

<sup>264</sup> Winton Pitcoff, “Developing Workers: Community-Based Job Training Brings Families Out of Poverty,” *National Housing Institute* 102.

to libraries or similar public-education facilities in areas of high and concentrated poverty can bring marked improvements to such communities. Libraries provide space for community gatherings and can supply safe and positive structured or unstructured educational opportunities for residents of all ages. Ultimately, libraries can improve a community's sense of cohesion and increase civic engagement.

An analysis of Florida's libraries found a return on investment (ROI) of \$6.54 for each public dollar invested in its libraries, while an analysis of Colorado's libraries identified an ROI of \$4.99.<sup>266,267</sup> The benefits of libraries identified in these studies include direct and indirect job creation, local wage growth, and a more attractive environment to attract and retain businesses. Additionally, a study about Seattle libraries concluded that libraries provide services of intrinsic value, such as book lending, that are unlikely to be replicated if the library is no longer there. In other words, people will simply stop reading if a library vanishes from their community, rather than finding a new way to get books. Conversely, communities without easy access to a library are unlikely to seek out the same services elsewhere.

Libraries will not be a perfect fit for each neighborhood or vacant lot. For an effective library, the community should not have easy access to another local library, and there must be a large enough parcel of land. In addition, new library facilities may be prohibitively expensive, between the cost of building or renovating a new facilities and acquiring new books, computers, and other important equipment.

Another option for a publicly funded initiative using vacant lots to improve education and job preparedness in the community is to build a community center that includes job training resources such as employment counselors, workshops and classes, employment resource centers, and access to essential technology. Such services are fairly standard in libraries, but community centers are a lower-cost alternative that can be built on smaller parcels of land than a library.

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<sup>265</sup> While the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh system is an independent nonprofit organization, a substantial amount of their funding comes from the local Pittsburgh sales tax and other grants from the city. In addition, city, county, and other public officials make up one-third of the board of trustees, including four members of city council. In 2014, CLP opened its newest branch in Hazelwood, in part because of the urging and encouragement of City Council and with significant financial support from Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Sally Sleeper and Rena Rudavsky, "Assessing the Future of the Carnegie Library System," *RAND*, 2009.

Joe Smydo, "Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Opens New Hazelwood Branch," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 2014.

<sup>266</sup> Griffiths et al., "Taxpayer Return on Investment in Florida Public Libraries," *State Library and Archives of Florida*. September 2004.

<sup>267</sup> Nicole Steffen, "Libraries: a Wise Investment."

## Health

Concentrated poverty strikes a powerful blow to individual health, both physical and mental. People living in concentrated poverty experience higher rates of chronic illnesses including diabetes,<sup>268</sup> obesity,<sup>269</sup> and asthma.<sup>270</sup> Even more striking is the negative impact on residents' mental health. A 2004 survey of a large Chicago public housing complex in a concentrated poverty neighborhood revealed six times higher rates of anxiety and four times higher rates of depression among adults, and seven times higher anxiety rates in youth, compared to the national average.<sup>271</sup> These tangible differences in health outcomes can be attributed to a number of factors. First, concentrated poverty neighborhoods—and especially low-income black and Hispanic neighborhoods—are much more likely to be located near environmental hazards and major sources of pollution such as freeways, industrial centers, landfills, and dilapidated housing built from dangerous or toxic materials.<sup>272</sup> Studies have demonstrated a concrete link between the higher air pollution found in concentrated poverty neighborhoods and the higher rates of asthma found in concentrated poverty residents, which in turn contribute to school absences.<sup>273</sup> Plus, good nutrition tends to be either too expensive or otherwise inaccessible, as represented by the food deserts these neighborhoods often experience.<sup>274</sup> People in concentrated poverty neighborhoods also enjoy less access to healthcare. Census data from 2014 shows that sixteen percent of individuals below the federal poverty line are uninsured and sixty-three percent are on Medicaid, which signals that these individuals have access to fewer doctors and hospitals with more limited resources.<sup>275</sup> In contrast, mixed-income neighborhoods with more affluent residents are associated with sustained neighborhood social organizations and subsequently better health.<sup>276</sup> Finally, people in concentrated poverty must face the psychological

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<sup>268</sup> Darrell J. Gaskin, et al., “Disparities in Diabetes: The Nexus of Race, Poverty, and Place,” *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 11 (November 2014).

<sup>269</sup> Adam Drewnowski, SE Specter, “Poverty and Obesity: the Role of Energy Density and Energy Costs,” *American Society for Clinical Nutrition* 79, (2004): 6-16.

<sup>270</sup> Lara J. Akinbami, et al., “Trends in Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality in the United States, 2001-2010,” *NCHS Data Brief* 94, (May 2012): 1-8.

<sup>271</sup> Reed Jordan, “Poverty’s Toll on Mental Health,” *Urban Wire*, 25 November 2013.

<sup>272</sup> Kyle Crowder and Liam Downey, “Inter-Neighborhood Migration, Race, and Environmental Hazards: Modeling Micro-Level Processes of Environmental Inequality,” *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 4 (January 2010).

<sup>273</sup> Lara J. Akinbami, et al.

<sup>274</sup> “Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People Are Vulnerable to Obesity,” Food Research & Action Center.

<sup>275</sup> Jessica C. Smith, Carla Medalia, “Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2014,” *The United States Census Bureau*, September 2015, Accessed 05 December 2016, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-253.pdf>.

harm of food insecurity, trauma, and victimization, both by external forces such as the government and media as well as their own communities.<sup>277</sup> Maladaptive responses to mental distress can include substance abuse, which of course only exacerbates health problems.<sup>278</sup>

### *Business*

Neighborhoods in high and concentrated poverty often suffer from a lack of businesses necessary to residents' basic health, especially grocery stores. Moore and Roux found that while low-income neighborhoods had four times as many grocery stores as the wealthiest neighborhoods, they also had half as many supermarkets.<sup>279</sup> Residents of these neighborhoods often pay more for food due to the lack of large chain supermarkets, which are more likely to sell food products in bulk and at discounted prices.<sup>280</sup> Alit and Donley found that people living in high poverty neighborhoods must travel an average of over two miles to access similar numbers of businesses catering to their essential needs as those living in low-poverty neighborhoods.<sup>281</sup> The types of businesses placed in a community can have a direct effect on the community's overall health. Businesses that often exploit low-income people, such as liquor stores and fast food chains, generally outnumber businesses that actually benefit residents, especially those selling inexpensive produce.<sup>282</sup>

Lack of access to affordable, healthy food makes it challenging for low-income families to maintain well-balanced diets, often forcing them to depend on high-density, low-nutrition options from fast food restaurants and convenience stores.<sup>283</sup> Unhealthy diets founded on a lack of healthy alternatives correlates to the worse health outcomes, such as diabetes and obesity, found in low-income residents of high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods.<sup>284</sup> Placing businesses like grocery stores and supermarkets in these neighborhoods offers a solid foundation

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<sup>276</sup> Ming Wen, Christopher R. Browning, Kathleen A. Cagney, "Poverty, Affluence, and Income Inequality: Neighborhood Economic Structure and its Implications for Health," *Social Science and Medicine* 57, no. 5 (September 2003).

<sup>277</sup> Emily Badger, "How Poverty Taxes the Brain," *CityLab*, 29 August 2013.

<sup>278</sup> Margaret E. Ensminger, James C. Anthony, Joan McCord, "The Inner City and Drug Use: Initial Findings from an Epidemiological Study," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 48, (1997): 175-184.

<sup>279</sup> Moore and Roux, *American Journal of Public Health*, 2006.

<sup>280</sup> Chung & Myers, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 1999.

<sup>281</sup> Alit and Donley, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 1997.

<sup>282</sup> Moorland, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2002.

<sup>283</sup> Food Research and Action Center, "Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People Are Vulnerable to Obesity," Accessed 05 December 2016, <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/why-are-low-income-and-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-to-obesity/>.

<sup>284</sup> Rebecca Flournoy, National Housing Institute "Healthy foods, Strong Communities."

for their residents to begin making healthy lifestyle choices. For example, the Fresh Food Financing Initiative was a Pennsylvania-wide private-public partnership that opened eighty-eight new supermarkets in places of need, ultimately providing 500,000 citizens statewide with access to healthy food.<sup>285</sup>

More indirectly, businesses can also improve residents' health by reducing pollution. Businesses may increase a neighborhood's environmental sustainability, since a larger number of nearer businesses reduce residents' need to drive in order to meet their shopping needs. Clusters of small businesses near residential areas can reduce air pollution and urban sprawl, contributing to better health for all residents. Though grocery stores can often be difficult to attract and sustain in poor neighborhoods, economic incentives like tax subsidies as well as partnerships with community organizations can allow these stores to thrive, bringing sustenance to former food deserts.<sup>286</sup>

### *Green Spaces*

The greening of vacant lots is associated with benefits to the health of individual residents and the greater community. The presence of green spaces has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.<sup>287</sup> Green spaces give residents an area to escape the stressful noise and frustration of urban life, and generally decrease fear of crime. Studies have also shown that children with ADHD focus their attention better after walks through green spaces as compared to urban or suburban environments.<sup>288</sup> Since mental health plays a large role in physical health, these benefits will contribute to healthier, happier lives. Increased green space lowers mortality rates and the number of health complaints residents have.<sup>289</sup>

Another way green space improves physical health is through increasing residents' access to exercise locations. Even stabilization and side-yard efforts were proven to increase physical activity in low-income neighborhoods of Philadelphia, most likely due to a decrease in fear of crime while exercising alone on the streets of neighborhoods.<sup>290</sup> Parks can provide, trails, courts,

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<sup>285</sup> Allison Karpyn, Sarah Treuhaft, "The Grocery Gap: Who has access to healthy food and why it matters."

<sup>286</sup> Joseph Erbenraut, "How One Grocery Chain Succeeds in Low-Income, Underserved Communities," *The Huffington Post*, 15 May 2015.

<sup>287</sup> Kirsten M. M. Beyer, et al.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> Charles C. Branas, Rose A. Cheney, John M. MacDonald, Vicky W. Tam, Tara D. Jackson, Thomas R. Ten Have, "A Difference-in-Differences Analysis of Health, Safety, and Greening Vacant Urban Space," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 174, no. 11 (2011).

ballfields, and many other places to exercise beyond neighborhood streets. The development of such facilities allow neighborhoods to organize health-oriented activities like youth sports leagues.<sup>291</sup>

Community gardens also provide physical health benefits. Increased gardening, characterized as a moderate to heavy intensity physical activity, is linked to decreases in cholesterol and systolic blood pressure.<sup>292</sup> Access to community gardens can also increase the nutritional health of neighborhood residents. In one study, adults with a household member who participated in a community garden consumed fruits and vegetables 1.4 more times per day, and were 3.5 more times as likely to consume produce the recommended five times a day, than those without a connection to a community garden.<sup>293</sup> These effects can be particularly strong when young people have access to community gardens and can utilize them for science and nutrition educational studies.<sup>294</sup>

The health of the neighborhood as a whole also is impacted by green spaces. In greened lots, less trash accumulates, less dumping of hazardous materials occurs, and neighbors of vacant lots can drastically reduce their pesticide use due to the decreased insect and animal traffic of the newly stabilized area.<sup>295</sup> Additionally, the U.S. Forest Service estimates that in a fifty-year lifespan a single tree can generate \$31,250 worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 in air pollution remediation, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and dictates \$31,250 worth of soil erosion.<sup>296</sup> If maintained properly, stabilized lots can play a huge role in community health on both an individual and holistic level.

### *Public Facilities*

A potential public option for vacant land is to create urban parks or other opportunities for recreation. These facilities promote healthy, active lifestyles—putting new recreation space

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<sup>290</sup> Michelle C. Kondo, Eugenia C. South, Charles C. Branas, “Nature-Based Strategies for Improving Urban Health and Safety,” *Journal of Urban Health* 92, no. 5 (2015).

<sup>291</sup> Ioan Voicu, Vicki Been.

<sup>292</sup> Gardening Matters.

<sup>293</sup> Katherine Alaimo, Elizabeth Packnett, Richard A. Miles, Daniel J. Kruger, “Fruit and Vegetable Intake among Urban Community Gardeners,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 40, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>294</sup> Jane E. Schukoske, “Community Development Through Gardening: State and Local Policies Transforming Urban Open Space,” *Legislation and Public Policy* 3, no. 351 (2014).

<sup>295</sup> Michelle C. Kondo, et al., “Nature-Based Strategies for Improving Urban Health and Safety.”

<sup>296</sup> Cleveland City Planning Commission, “8 Ideas for Vacant Land Re-Use in Cleveland,” Accessed 04 December 2016, <http://planning.city.cleveland.oh.us/ftp/8IdeasForVacantLandReuseCleveland.pdf>.

into a neighborhood can increase by as much as twenty-five percent the number of residents who exercise at least three times per week.<sup>297</sup> Parks can also help manage storm water and improve air quality, both of which improve public health.

However, parks require a lot of available, contiguous space and can be expensive to develop and maintain. Indoor or outdoor recreation facilities, such as ball courts, require less space, but cannot be utilized by as many people as parks because they are smaller and serve narrower purposes. However, such facilities also contribute economic benefits to the area that can help cover their expenses. One study using data from Portland, Oregon determined that urban parks resulted in a 1.8 percent increase in mean property value within 1,500 feet of the park. Golf courses created a 13.1 percent increase in property values and “natural area parks” where natural vegetation took up a majority of the area increased local property values by 15.8 percent.<sup>298</sup> While the investment in parks and recreation is typically worthwhile, these facilities make the biggest impact in areas that have high poverty, but not concentrated poverty.

### *Wellness*

The municipal government has several options for supporting public initiatives that improve local health using vacant land. One option is to build a Community Health Center (CHC) in a neighborhood with poor health outcomes, low health insurance rates, and low average income. CHCs are federally funded public health clinics that specialize in preventative health care and serve generally low-income populations, especially those without health insurance.<sup>299</sup> Considering both the type of care CHCs provide and the populations they serve, they can be important community resources that significantly improve local health outcomes. Poor, uninsured people tend to be sicker than the average population for a host of environmental reasons. This is particularly true in areas of high or concentrated poverty, where the personal burden of being poor is compounded by living in a community of similarly poor people. This double burden arises because a poor community cannot support the local institutions and resources that promote wellbeing and improve quality of life, such as grocery stores that sell fresh producer, pharmacies, and private medical clinics.

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<sup>297</sup> National Recreation Parks and Association, “Parks and Recreation: A Public Health in Underserved Areas: Perspective.”

<sup>298</sup> Ioan Voicu, Vicki Been.

<sup>299</sup> Ellen-Marie Whelan, “The Importance of Community Health Centers,” *Center for American Progress*, 09 August 2010.

A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco concluded that CHCs around the country have lowered medical costs in the communities that they serve by forty-one percent. People served by a CHC are between eleven to twenty-two percent less likely to be hospitalized. Overall, CHCs have produced \$12.5 billion in direct and indirect benefits to their communities.<sup>300</sup> Therefore, CHCs in Pittsburgh's high poverty and concentrated poverty neighborhoods can be an important community benefit: improving local health outcomes and injecting money into the local economy.

## **Safety**

There has always existed a strong positive link between concentrated poverty and crime.<sup>301</sup> Low-income individuals living in high and concentrated poverty neighborhoods are more likely to be both victims and offenders. Individuals in low-income households are the victims of violent crime, including murder, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery at twice the rate of high-income individuals.<sup>302</sup> A Gallup poll showed that twenty-two percent of adults earning less than \$30,000 were victims of at least one of seven common crimes, compared to fifteen percent of individuals earning more than \$75,000.<sup>303</sup> Concentrated poverty appears to create both "easy" victims and perpetrators of crime, owing to a mix of factors including less risk of apprehension or punishment, ineffective policing, and the lack of legal economic or social opportunities.<sup>304</sup> High rates of vacancy in particular have been shown to be connected to violent crime rates in impoverished neighborhoods.<sup>305</sup> Filling vacancies in neighborhoods of high and concentrated poverty would both protect residents from crime and allow them to perceive their community as safer, thereby improving their quality of life overall.

## *Culture*

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<sup>300</sup> Scott Spote and Annie Donovan, "Community Health Centers: A Vital Strategy for Community Development," Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

<sup>301</sup> Paul B. Stretesky, Amie M. Schuck, & Michael J. Hogan, "Space matters: an analysis of poverty, poverty clustering, and violent crime," *Justice Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> Jim Norman, "Young, Poor, Urban Dwellers Most Likely to Be Crime Victims," *Gallup*, 06 November 2015.

<sup>304</sup> Matthew R. Lee, "Concentrated Poverty, Race, and Homicide," *The Sociological Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (April 2000).

<sup>305</sup> Matthew Cmar, Timothy DiSalvio, Keith Dougall, and Jennifer Knapp Rioja, "Using PNCIS Data to Model Vacancy, Crime, and Property Taxes in the CONNECT Region," University of Pittsburgh PIA 2096 Capstone Seminar, 05 May 2015.

Cultural spaces can serve as valuable outlets and safe spaces to discourage engaging in destructive activities. Youth especially can benefit from cultural spaces in areas of poverty. As individuals participate in more networking and community-building activities, they will feel more connected to their peers and less likely to engage in destructive behaviors that hinder the success of the community as a whole.

The Promising Afterschool Programs Study analyzed the changed behaviors of 3,000 low-income, ethnically diverse students in elementary and middle schools. Compared to their peers who did not participate in an afterschool program, these elementary students reported reduced aggressive behavior toward other students and increased school attendance, while middle school students reported reduced drug and alcohol use.<sup>306</sup> Cultural and educational facilities can provide essential safe spaces for children, to encourage positive behaviors and decrease the likelihood of negative behaviors.

### *Green Spaces*

Studies show an association between stabilizing lots and reductions in gun, violent, assault, burglary, robbery, vandalism, and many other types of crime.<sup>307</sup> In a study on Youngstown, Ohio there was an eighty-five percent reduction in felony assaults, twenty-four percent reduction in burglaries, sixty-nine percent reduction in robberies, and a seven percent reduction in theft at newly greened lots.<sup>308</sup> Despite generally reducing crime rates, green spaces, especially parks, can increase the fear and occurrence of crime. For this reason, parks are often a contentious issue of debate during urban community development.

Green spaces can have negative effects on fear and occurrence of crime in highly distressed, high-crime areas. Property values in Baltimore increased in every type of neighborhood when green space was added, except neighborhoods that met the previously described profile.<sup>309</sup> In one study on Philadelphia's greening efforts, areas of high distress experienced no benefits of an addition of a park, but moderately distressed neighborhoods experienced the largest benefit in property value.<sup>310</sup> By displaying community care and

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<sup>306</sup> Afterschool Alliance, "Afterschool Programs: Making a Difference in America's Communities by Improving Academic Achievement, Keeping Kids Safe and Helping Working Families," 2008.

<sup>307</sup>Michelle Kondo, Bernadette Hohl, SeungHoon Han, Charles Branas, "Effects of Greening and Community Reuse of Vacant Lots on Crime," *Urban Studies* 53, no. 15 (2016).

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Megan Heckert, Jeremy Mennis.

investment, increasing the foot traffic and the number of witnesses to potential crimes, and lines of sight green spaces can effectively increase the sense that an area is being watched over and cared for, which reduces crime.<sup>311</sup> If parks incorporate small ground-level plants and high-canopy trees, are plotted on flat surfaces, and are gridded and vegetated non-densely, many concerns about green space and crime could be alleviated. Neighborhoods especially fearful that a park would provide a safe haven for neighborhood crime could turn to smaller greening options like side-lot programs, community gardens, or smaller park features, such as walking paths, generally referred to as greenways.<sup>312</sup> Effective lot selection, design, and maintenance with the understanding of the crime-related concerns would allow natural parks to provide a community benefit instead of detriment.

Even with these considerations, some types of crime seem likely to increase following the greening of lots. Studies have shown disorderly conduct and car theft increase around newly greened areas due to the fact more people visit the location. At newly greened lots in Youngstown, car theft increased by fifty-three percent after stabilization.<sup>313</sup> These increases in certain crimes must be compared to the positives. Even stabilization efforts, which are relatively cheap, can cause major benefits for crime reduction. For example, in neighborhoods targeted by Richmond, Virginia's effort to stabilize lots, overall crime decreased by nineteen percent in the first three years of the program while city-wide, crime went down by six percent.<sup>314</sup> Even as little as a ten percent increase in tree cover in Baltimore has led to twelve percent crime reductions.<sup>315</sup>

Green spaces offer the most to gain for impoverished neighborhoods. The successful execution of such a natural, open park, however, is far more difficult in neighborhoods that are

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> In one study, people assessing the courtyard environment of housing complexes reported decreased sense of safety when vegetation blocked views, but increased sense of safety when vegetation did not obstruct lines of vision. Another study justified these sentiments by proving small trees that obstructed views were associated with increased property crime and burglary on houses, but also that tall trees and trees on the street decreased violent and property crime.

Michelle Kondo, et al., "Nature-Based Strategies for Improving Urban Health and Safety."

<sup>312</sup> Moreover, certain design features of green spaces can help reduce crime in distressed neighborhoods. For example, one study in Baltimore showed that boundaries provided by fences or gardens, well-kept grass, and signs of beautification and personalization caused lower fear of crime and actually resulted in lower crime rates. Sean Burkholder, "The New Ecology of Vacancy: Rethinking Land Use in Shrinking Cities," *Sustainability* 4, no. 6 (2012): 1154-1172.

<sup>313</sup> Michelle Kondo, et al.

<sup>314</sup> Joseph Schilling, Jonathan Logan, "Greening the Rust Belt: A Green Infrastructure Model for Right Sizing America's Shrinking Cities," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 74, no. 4, 2008.

<sup>315</sup> Austin Troy, J. Morgan Grove, Jarlath O'Neil-Dune, "The Relationship Between Tree Canopy and Crime Rates Across an Urban-Rural Gradient in the Greater Baltimore Region," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 106, 2012.

very distressed with a perception and presence of crime. These neighborhoods may elect to consider other greening options like community gardens or greenways.

### *Public Facilities*

The Pittsburgh City Government can use vacant land to reduce crime rates by directing and funding the Pittsburgh Police Department to open storefront substations in high-crime communities. These substations are low cost and give police an accessible, direct foothold in communities, from which they can interact with the public and build relationships and trust with community members. Usually staffed by one to four officers, storefront substations also provide safe spaces for public meetings, and facilitate walk-in crime reports. Furthermore, they provide a convenient base of operations for community patrols and other methods of community policing.<sup>316</sup>

Though popular with communities and a key piece of community policing, storefront substations have not been definitely proven to directly reduce crime rates. When the Los Angeles police department opened three new storefronts, the crime rate surrounding each storefront dropped between eighteen and forty-seven percent.<sup>317</sup> However, a more comprehensive study by the federal government found no evidence that new storefront substations directly reduced crime.<sup>318</sup> Still, the study concluded that police substations can function as an important component of a broader community-policing strategy, giving police stations a base of operations from which to patrol neighborhoods and build community relationships. That type of broader community policing strategy produces quantifiable benefits.

### **Conclusion**

Our policy recommendation is a decision tree that guides city government officials and community leaders through a menu of potential policy options for using vacant land to improve the lives of residents in concentrated poverty neighborhoods and high poverty neighborhoods that are declining or gentrifying neighborhoods. This recommendation represents the consolidation of a wide range of research on the many ways in which vacant land, an

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<sup>316</sup> Bertus Ferreira, "The Use and Effectiveness of Community Policing in a Democracy," *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*.

<sup>317</sup> Andrew Blechman, "Communities Buy into Storefront Police Sites," *LA Times*, 23 July 1995.

<sup>318</sup> Ferreira, "The Use and Effectiveness of Community Policy."

underutilized resource already at the City's disposal, can be employed to alleviate the worst symptoms of high and concentrated poverty. A combination of new businesses, public facilities, green spaces, wellness centers, cultural spaces, and affordable housing can help to ensure that residents of poor neighborhoods are healthier and safer, that they have access to family-sustaining jobs and affordable housing, and that their communities are thriving. We recognize that the City budget for development is finite. Therefore, we do not intend our decision tree to prescribe development actions that the city government must immediately pursue using its own funds. Rather, we intend the decision tree to be a long-term tool for all Pittsburghers seeking to improve impoverished neighborhoods as they work with private, public, and nonprofit partners. Utilized properly, the decision tree will provide present and future anti-poverty reformers with the inspiration and evidence necessary to advocate for low and high investment policy actions that will have a positive impact in their community.

## **Limits and Topics for Further Study**

While this policy document represents a thorough review of literature and data related to questions of housing, gentrification, and poverty in Pittsburgh, and though it is the product of hard work by a dedicated team of students, it is also subject to a number of important limitations. First of all, we were limited by time constraints. This report represents the product of eight researchers over a four-month period. By comparison, the research and recommendations produced for the 2016 P4 Conference, addressing a similar topic, were produced by more than 100 contributors working for an entire year. Furthermore, the relevant policies and problems related to housing and gentrification comprise a vast array of information and ideas, whereas our project focuses on vacant land, which is a small facet of concentrated poverty. Additionally, concentrated poverty itself is only one of many issues related to housing and gentrification. Though we unearthed plenty of useful data, we also found that much of the data surrounding vacant land and its usage is limited, qualitative in nature, or simply nonexistent. At times, we had to rely on predictions, policy analysis, and logical reasoning instead of hard data.

We also encountered a number of social barriers that placed limitations on our work. Pittsburgh is a diverse city with many different neighborhoods, each with its own unique culture, demographic makeup, and challenges. Our task was to recommend an approach to vacant land use that is relevant to every neighborhood in the city, making the process inherently subjective and limiting how specific our policy could be. Meanwhile, there are differences and disagreements among academics, policy makers, members of Pittsburgh City Council, and members of our own group about gentrification and development. Some view these processes positively, viewing development as the only way to improve neighborhoods. Others associate these processes primarily with negative factors like displacement. It was part of our task to balance these perspectives. We also struggled to find the proper balance between consulting policy makers, experts, and industry, and consulting the actual residents of the city who live in high and concentrated poverty areas. Ultimately, we produced a document that relies heavily on the input of experts, yet it ultimately puts the power into the hands of residents. Finally, we were cognizant of the legacy of housing policy in Pittsburgh and in the United States, which has produced unintended consequences including de facto segregation and concentrated poverty.

This posed a significant limitation, as we had to approach our work with our best intentions, yet understanding also that we had to proceed cautiously to avoid unintended consequences.

Considering the scope of the issues involved in this policy proposal, we recognize that there is much room for further study in the areas of gentrification, concentrated poverty, and vacant land use. Our policy recommendation includes a decision tree that can be used by the Pittsburgh City Council, in conjunction with area residents, to assist them in deciding how to improve their communities through the use of vacant land. We recognize, however, that this is just a first step in addressing the larger issues at play, and encourage further study in the areas addressed below.

First, more research must be dedicated to finding strategies for funding vacant land development in Pittsburgh. Due to the time limitations of this project, we were unable to fully address the question of where the city will get the funding to develop these vacant areas into places of use for their communities. Considering Pittsburgh's strong history of encouraging public/private partnerships in redevelopment efforts, we would encourage future study into creating these relationships and assisting private investment into redevelopment efforts for vacant land use.

A second area of study that requires further research is the impact of redevelopment projects that are taking place in Pittsburgh right now. Following the release of the Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Task Force Report in May and the P4 Conference in October of this year, it is a time of attention and change for the issues we have addressed in this report. This attention on issues of gentrification and concentrated poverty is a promising step for the City, but requires more focus on the lasting impacts and lasting effect the recommended programs will have on Pittsburgh.

Finally, further study should be focused on how to better integrate the local communities and Pittsburgh residents into these conversations. While our policy recommendation is meant to be used in partnership with the Pittsburgh City Council and local communities, we recognize that guarantees are needed in order to ensure residents have as strong a voice as possible in the decision-making process. Further efforts should research how best to ensure all decisions made regarding development are understood and advocated at the community level. Currently, many residents in Pittsburgh are extremely involved in development processes in their areas; however further efforts are needed to guarantee local voices are heard.

With such a large policy scope, further research is needed to adequately address the impacts that any policies would have on the City. Addressing the effects of concentrated poverty, vacant land use, and gentrification will require a committed and continuous effort from every branch of City government and all residents of Pittsburgh. As a city, we are up to the task of making sure Pittsburgh lives up to its reputation of “a most livable city.”

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