

Moving Forward Together



ALLENTOWN
ARLINGTON
ARLINGTON
HEIGHTS
BELTZHOVER
CARRICK
KNOXVILLE
MT. OLIVER
MT. OLIVER
BOROUGH
ST. CLAIR



A Community Conversation

July 21, 2007

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Potters House Ministries

430 Cathedral Street, Mt. Oliver

This booklet has been prepared as part of a community leadership initiative facilitated by a team from the Southside-based Coro Center for Civic Leadership and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Program for Deliberative Democracy.

Working on behalf of the residents of South Pittsburgh, the project team attended meetings of the South Pittsburgh Steering Committee; conducted interviews with community leaders, organizations, and resource providers; and administered a survey to 150 people representing a cross section of the neighborhoods of Allentown, Arlington, Arlington Heights, Beltzhoover, Carrick, Knoxville, Mt. Oliver, Mt. Oliver Borough, and St. Clair. The Birmingham Foundation provided partial funding for the work of the project team.

Coro is a national organization devoted to training ethical, diverse civic leaders. With offices in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Kansas City, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, Coro trains leaders to develop skills; master tools needed to engage and empower communities; gain experience in government, business, labor and not-for-profit community organizations; and participate in special community and political problem solving processes.

The **Southwestern Pennsylvania Program for Deliberative Democracy** (SPPDD) is housed at Carnegie Mellon University. SPPDD strives to improve local and regional decision-making by engaging citizens in informed democratic deliberations. The SPDD facilitates various forms of democratic dialogue, including the Deliberative Poll® developed by Jim Fishkin, in order to indicate what citizens of Southwestern Pennsylvania would think about important issues if they are provided with critical information and the time to become immersed in a deeply deliberative process.

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**Southwestern Pennsylvania Program for
Deliberative Democracy**

The project team would like to thank the following for their contributions to this booklet:
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and Nicole Stevens.

Dear Neighbor:

Thank you for joining the Community Conversation on July 21, 2007! Now is a critical time for the neighborhoods of South Pittsburgh. We face many challenges, but we still have a chance to turn things around.

We are concerned about increasing crime and violence. We are concerned that our children do not have adequate resources to succeed in life. We are concerned that families are relocating out of our communities. We believe it is important to attract and to keep families in our communities. And we believe that home ownership is the best way to build a family-oriented community.

We will move forward if we work together and share resources across neighborhoods.

We have been coming together over the last few months to identify our shared concerns and to discuss some ways that we can work together to address these concerns. We are developing a community Action Agenda, and we need your help.

We have developed this booklet to help you join the Community Conversation. In this booklet you will find information about:

- Shared concerns that effect all of our neighborhoods
- Ideas for Moving Forward Together
- Resources we can share
- One possible new resource: the Department of Justice's Weed and Seed Initiative

To develop a strong Action Agenda we will need the experience, insight, and active participation of residents and businesses in all of our neighborhoods. So that you can better help us think about how to address the challenges our neighborhoods face, please read this booklet before joining us at the Community Conversation. Thank you for your commitment and participation. We look forward to hearing your unique perspective on July 21st!

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SOUTH PITTSBURGH'S STEERING COMMITTEE

WHO WE ARE

We are group of residents, business owners, and ministers from Allentown, Arlington, Arlington Heights, Beltzhoover, Carrick, Knoxville, Mt. Oliver, Mt. Oliver Borough, and St. Clair. Over the last few months we have come together with law enforcement officers and public officials from the City, County, and State governments to discuss how we can stop the increase of crime and violence and work together to revitalize our neighborhoods.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING

We have met each month to discuss the concerns we share, identify the challenges we face, and discuss how residents, community leaders, public officials, and law enforcement officers can work together to address these challenges.

With support from the Birmingham Foundation, a team from the Southside-based Coro Center for Civic Leadership and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Program for Deliberative Democracy observed our meetings. They listened to our discussions and recorded our concerns and ideas. They then took the information we provided and met with resource partners (*please see Appendix A*). These resource partners provided our neighborhoods with information and suggestions.

This project team also coordinated the recruitment campaign that brings you to the Community Conversation. Community residents and Public Allies (supported by AmeriCorps) joined the project team as they went door-to-door in each of our neighborhoods. Residents were asked to complete a survey, and based on 150 responses, we are confident that the challenges and resources identified in this document represent a broad consensus across our neighborhoods. With the information gathered at our meetings, the information provided by the resource partners, and the information that was gathered from the surveys, the project team developed the booklet you are now reading.

COMING TOGETHER: JULY 21ST

The Community Conversation will be your chance to provide further input on our shared concerns and help us develop ideas for how to address our challenges. Our conversation will involve residents from all nine of the neighborhoods listed on the cover of this booklet. By joining together on this day, we will raise a voice we hope will be heard by our neighbors and by officials at all levels of government.

In the following booklet you will find information that will help you join the Community Conversation. However, here we provide a brief introduction to what to expect at a Community Conversation and to the questions that we hope to discuss on July 21st.

Five elements of a Community Conversation

1. Participants willing to be respectful to one another but honest about the issues being discussed
2. Balanced information about the issues (including this booklet)
3. Discussion in small groups, which is documented for the community by trained facilitators
4. An opportunity for residents to pose questions to Resource Partners who have expertise in dealing with the kinds of challenges facing our community
5. At the end of the day, participants complete a survey, which serves as an opportunity to share their unique perspective

Preview of Community Conversation Topics

1. How can we encourage people to get more involved in our communities?
2. What is the best way to coordinate the activities of the many groups operating in our neighborhoods?
3. How, if at all, can the mayor's new programs help build trust and strengthen relationships between residents and police?
4. What is the best way for our community associations (e.g., block watches) to work together, along with police, to prevent crimes from occurring?
5. How can we better coordinate existing resources to provide the opportunities our youth need to succeed?
6. As residents, how can we work together to promote revitalization in our communities?
7. What input can we provide to make sure a Weed and Seed plan adequately addresses the needs of our community?

ACTING TOGETHER

WHY ACT NOW?

We are at a “tipping point” — our neighborhoods can go one way or another:

- Increased levels of crime and violence, decreasing homeownership, and a steady loss of population, businesses, and schools present challenges for all of our neighborhoods.
- We still have resources in our neighborhoods that we can use to address these challenges
 - Active community leaders
 - Community Associations
 - Caring residents
 - Engaged public officials
- Active residents providing clear direction can make sure these resources are working together to address our neighborhoods’ challenges.

We have resource providers ready to help us. Our neighborhoods now have the attention of:

- Public Officials (City, State, and County)
- Private Foundations (e.g., Birmingham Foundation)
- Nonprofit Development Organizations (e.g., Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development).



Tipping Point: New Homes and family-run businesses compete with graffiti, overgrown lots, and crumbling streets on Climax Street

WHY ACT TOGETHER?

- **Our Children:** They have already come together. They attend the same schools, play in the same recreation centers and are teammates in the same athletic leagues.
- **Crime:** Criminals respect no borders, all of our neighborhoods are experiencing the decline in quality of life that drugs, crime, and violence have brought to South Pittsburgh.
- **Attracting Residents and Development:** We share schools, bus lines, and business districts. Potential new residents and new businesses do not recognize the borders of our neighborhoods—when they are looking for a home or a new place to do business, they see our neighborhoods as one area or one “market.”
- **Access to Resources:** Representatives from public programs and private development organizations have told us that if we work together to develop a shared Action Agenda then we will be able to access more resources to address our challenges.
- **Coming Together Works:** Other communities in Pittsburgh have achieved a lot by sharing resources to address their shared concerns (e.g., the Northside, the East End)
- **Making Sure Your Voice is Heard:** Because we share so much, the Action Agenda we develop should represent the needs of all of our neighborhoods. To make sure that it does represent everyone’s needs, we will need residents from every neighborhood at the table as we develop our community’s Action Agenda.



Common Ground: Looking at South Pittsburgh from Knoxville.

ITEMS FOR A SHARED ACTION AGENDA

1 FOSTERING LEADERSHIP

- The more active we are in our communities, the more effectively we can meet present challenges.

2 WORKING TOGETHER

- The more we work together and share resources across neighborhoods, the better we will be able to address individual neighborhood needs.

3 PREVENTING CRIME

- In order to address crime, we must strengthen relationships and create lines of communication between residents and the police. Both parties need to share responsibility for developing this relationship.
- We can strengthen relationships through Community Policing initiatives.

4 PROVIDING FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

- We are concerned that youth in our neighborhoods lack the educational, life-skills training, job opportunities they need to be successful in life.
- We must strengthen communication across generations and provide our youth and young adults opportunities to engage in civic life.
- We must find ways to support and encourage strong families in our neighborhoods.

5 REVITALIZING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

- We are concerned about absentee landlords, irresponsible renters, and decreasing homeownership. We believe we must find ways to manage housing and support homeownership in our neighborhoods.
- We are concerned that business closings, poor maintenance, graffiti, and litter make it difficult for residents to remain positive about our neighborhoods, and these challenges make our neighborhoods unattractive to new residents, and to new businesses.

FOSTERING LEADERSHIP

“Where is the next generation of leaders?”

To revitalize our neighborhoods, we will need more than good ideas – we will need people we can count on to take action. Strong neighborhoods rely on active residents. Active residents work with their neighbors to create opportunities for growth and development. Active residents also make sure that elected officials and law enforcement officers remain accountable to the community’s needs.

In all of our neighborhoods, groups of residents and business owners are working to revitalize their community. Many of these active residents are concerned that there simply are not enough people involved in our communities. To address crime, drugs, and the other significant challenges we face, we will need all the help we can get. A number of barriers may be keeping residents from getting more involved:

- The early-evening time when community groups meet is often difficult for parents, especially single parents, who have to work, get dinner on the table, help their kids with homework, etc.
- Parents find it difficult to attend meetings where no childcare is provided.
- Younger residents who have tried to get involved have sometimes been frustrated – Older residents say they want younger people at the table. But they may not always want to hear what the younger people have to say.

Some residents are active in their churches. Others volunteer for their children’s activities (e.g., coaching). Many people also participate in large community events such as the annual community celebrations in Arlington, Beltzhoover, and Mt. Oliver.

At our Community Conversation, we want to identify how residents are active. We also want to think about ways get more residents to become active – especially our youth and young adults. We may also want to discuss whether the activities we do together as neighbors are helping us to address the challenges our neighborhoods’ face.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 1

How can we encourage people to get more involved in our communities?

WORKING TOGETHER

“We need to keep each other updated on what we are doing.”

In order to move forward together, we need to share more than our challenges—we will need to share resources. There is a growing consensus in South Pittsburgh as well as other Pittsburgh neighborhoods that community organizations need to coordinate their activities with each other as much as possible. We may be able to learn from the strategies that other neighborhoods have developed for working together.

OPTION #1: INFORMAL COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Over the last few decades, Pittsburgh’s East End neighborhoods of Garfield, Bloomfield, Friendship, East Liberty, and Lawrenceville have developed a strategy of working together. While neighborhood-based organizations spend most of their time working on projects in their individual neighborhoods, they coordinate their efforts for certain initiatives, such as managing housing, marketing, and development planning.

OPTION #2: FORMAL COORDINATION – ONE “UMBRELLA” ORGANIZATION

While neighborhoods in the East End maintain separate organizations that collaborate only for certain initiatives, twelve neighborhoods on Pittsburgh’s North Side chose to create one “umbrella” organization that is responsible for joint planning and development across their neighborhoods: The North Side Leadership Conference.

These neighborhoods worked to develop a shared Action Agenda, and each neighborhood uses this one Agenda as a guide to their community development activities.

WHAT IS THE BEST STRATEGY FOR US?

Whether we choose one of the options above or find another way to work together, we have other communities to use as a resource for understanding how to create powerful cross-neighborhood collaboration. By coordinating

activities around a shared agenda, residents in these neighborhoods have been able to address many of the same challenges we are facing:

- They have revitalized their business districts and brought new businesses to their communities.
- They have created homeownership opportunities for their young residents and young families.
- They have worked with public schools (e.g., Peabody High School) and job providers (e.g., West Penn Hospital) to create training programs that lead to good jobs for their youth and young adults.
- They have created a more positive perception of their neighborhoods among their current residents and among potential new residents.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 2

What is the best way to coordinate the activities of the many groups operating in our neighborhoods?

PREVENTING CRIME

“Just because we say there are police who overstep their bounds doesn’t mean we don’t support the police.”

BUILDING TRUST AND STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND POLICE

Some residents are concerned that, when it comes to community-police relations, the two parties need to get to know one another better. For example, some residents think that the police don’t do enough to get to know our neighborhoods or our residents. As a result, some believe that the police are profiling our youth simply because of the style of clothes they wear.

At a recent community meeting in Beltzhoover, when the police admitted to profiling, some residents took this as an admission that the police are, in fact, improperly detaining people because of their appearance. For police profiling is not based on what people look like. Instead, police develop “profiles” of criminals based on information they get from their surveillance activities—from keeping an eye on the streets of our neighborhoods and watching how people behave.

The issues and confusion surrounding “profiling” is just one of the concerns residents have expressed about how police officers interact with residents in our neighborhoods. As a result, we want to develop strong, open lines of communication and cooperation between residents and the police—but we also want to be sure that both parties share the same level of commitment to this goal.

Recent proposals from the Mayor’s Office and the Chief of Police suggest that the police are also committed to developing strong, open lines of communication with the residents of Pittsburgh.¹ In May, the Chief of Police, Nate Harper, and our Zone Commander, Larry Ross, came to Beltzhoover and discussed some of these new programs. They include:

- More “beat cops” walking the streets and getting to know residents and business owners.

¹ “City Aims 7 Programs at Violence,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 05/09/07

- Adopt-a-Block, a program that encourages religious communities to work with the police to monitor the areas immediately surrounding their churches.
- Citizen Observer: A program that allows police and citizens to use an Internet-based alert system to inform each other almost immediately about crime or other important information.

In meetings of the South Pittsburgh Steering Committee, lines of communication between residents and the police have begun to develop, and a number of suggestions have been generated for how we can move forward to meet this challenge. For example, one suggestion is to develop a special forum where residents and the police can get together on a regular basis. Commander Ross suggested that residents may want to take part in the Citizens Police Academy, a 12 week, 36-hour, training program during which residents take part in some of the same training as the police (See Appendix C for more information about this and other new programs).

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 3

How, if at all, can the mayor's new programs help build trust and strengthen relationships between residents and police?

COMMUNITY POLICING

Another way to develop strong lines of communication between residents and the police is for both groups to work together in community policing. A recent article from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* describes community policing strategies that are having a major impact on communities throughout Pittsburgh (see Appendix C).

A number of neighborhoods have recently experienced a significant decrease in all types of crime, from homicide to burglary to graffiti. The police who patrol these neighborhoods believe that active community policing by residents has been an important factor contributing to the decline of crime in these neighborhoods. Much of this active participation has involved residents finding more ways to communicate with the police in their neighborhoods.

“Me and my neighbors are afraid to be seen talking to the police.”

Residents express fear that criminals will retaliate against people seen working with the police (i.e., “snitching”). Residents in other neighborhoods have addressed this problem by working in groups. Residents in these neighborhoods are becoming less afraid to act and speak out because they are acting and speaking out together.

For example, residents have helped close a nuisance bar by joining together and holding a candlelight vigil on the street outside of the bar. Squirrel Hill residents team up and drive around in their cars to patrol their neighborhood. When they see activity that concerns them, they stay in their cars and call police on their cell phones.

“What Can a Block Watch do?”

Like many of our neighborhoods, other communities have Block Watches (some neighborhoods use a more active term to describe their community’s watch group: Task Force). In some places, residents take advantage of technology to report crimes faster and more often. For example, residents get the cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses of their neighbors and their local public safety officers. When something happens in the neighborhood, residents immediately alert one another and the police by cell phone and e-mail.

Crime data suggest that some types of crime are dropping in our neighborhoods. The data represent crimes *reported* to the police, not convictions or arrests. Some residents say that they do not always call the police to report crimes. Others say that police do not respond quickly enough when they call.

When we talk about how to develop better relationships with our police, we may want to think about how we can use technology like cell phones and e-mails to report more crimes more often. We may also want to talk about why we are not always reporting the crimes we witness.

“The Police ‘camp-out’ in ‘hot spots’ and ignore the rest of the neighborhood.”

Some residents are concerned that police target “hot spots” while ignoring other areas in the neighborhood where crimes like burglary or vandalism occur. Rather than meet inside halls or community centers, residents can meet outdoors with public officials and police officers. Residents can take these officials to the places where they would like to see more police presence, like playgrounds and parks.

“Judges just let criminals back on the street.”

Residents are concerned that criminals too often get released back onto the streets after they get arrested. Community leaders often appear in court to represent their community in front of the judge. To avoid any danger of retaliation by criminals, it is possible to write our concerns in a “community impact statement” and deliver it to the court. These statements present judges with evidence about the effect criminals have on our communities. They also let the judge know that there is an active, organized, and concerned community keeping on eye on the activity of criminals *and judges*.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 4

What is the best way for our community associations (e.g., block watches) to work together, along with police, to prevent crimes from occurring?

PROVIDING FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

SCHOOLS

"I started school here, my kids started school here, but now there's not a school left in the neighborhood."

Our neighborhoods have lost six public schools in the last five years, and there are currently no private, Catholic, or charter schools operating in any of our nine neighborhoods.

On the next page we provide some information about how our children are doing in school. In order to include all of the children from our neighborhoods, the data is taken from 2005, before the recent reorganization of the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

VITAL SIGNS: SCHOOLS CLOSED SINCE 2003

Beltzhoover Elementary
Knoxville Elementary
Knoxville Middle
Prospect Elementary
Prospect Middle
South Vo-Tech

This information reveals that our elementary school children are struggling and doing poorly on standardized tests. However, they are improving a small bit from year-to-year. Unfortunately, the story is exactly the opposite for our high school students: achievement among high school students has decreased every year between 2003 and 2006 (see figures on page 14)².















Community leaders and school board officials believe that thirteen (13) is a critical age: if we do not find ways to actively support our children as they move from elementary school to middle school to high school, then many believe the trend of declining student achievement among teenagers will continue. Student achievement is just one measure suggesting our children will have fewer job opportunities and are at an increasing risk for involvement in crime.

As we think about how to address the challenges caused by school closings and declining student achievement, we can turn to **A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education**. A+ Schools works on behalf of residents to help make schools accountable to the communities they serve. A+ Schools facilitates meetings between residents and school officials, and they help residents develop plans for re-using old school buildings.





^{2 2} Data provided by A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education

VITAL SIGNS:
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCORING ON STATE-REQUIRED READING AND MATH TESTS
(5th Grade Students)

Total percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in 2005 / Percentage change 2002-2005

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>
Arlington	22.6% /  4.3%	54.8% /  35.3%
Concord	57.8% /  5.3%	64.5% /  18.4%
Grandview	60.5 % /  8.1%	75.5% /  31.2%
Knoxville	33.3% /  14.4%	44.0% /  22.4%
Phillip Murray	26.2% /  5.2%	33.3% /  7 %
Roosevelt	80.8% /  7.7%	80.9% /  19.3%
Pittsburgh Public School District Avg.:	46.2% /  9.7%	55.6% /  22%

HIGH SCHOOL SCORING ON STATE-REQUIRED READING AND MATH TESTS (11th Grade)

Brashear	45.5% /  12.7%	41.5% /  4.3 %
Carrick	44.7 % /  8.4%	38.4 % /  6%
Pittsburgh Public School District Avg.:	50.9% / NA	40.2% / NA

We may also find it useful to consider how other communities have addressed school closings and low student achievement. Some have worked with private companies or non-profit organizations to open Charter schools or private schools. In the two examples below, residents worked across neighborhoods and with private organizations to identify and develop their community's resources. In the first example residents used an old school building as a

resource. In the second example they supported the growth of a small but successful after-school program.

NEW LIFE FOR OLD SCHOOLS?

Although our schools have closed, they remain a resource for our neighborhoods. A+ Schools helps communities develop plans for new ways of using old school buildings.

There are many options we might consider, but the obvious one, of course, is finding a way to reopen them as schools. Some communities have opened charter schools in old public school buildings. Charter schools are run by private companies but are still within the jurisdiction of the Pittsburgh School District.

Therefore, tuition for children in charter schools must be paid by the district³. Appendix C provides some information about charter schools that are currently operating in Pittsburgh.



Knoxville Junior High (closed)

Of course, buying an old school is not cheap, and most old schools raise health concerns (e.g., asbestos, lead paint) that any private buyer will need to address⁴. Nonetheless, residents of Regent Square (which includes parts of Wilkinsburg, Edgewood, and Swissvale) were able to find a private company (School House Finance LLP) willing to pay \$3 million for the Regent Square Elementary school. The building was purchased in April, 2006, and the company plans to open a charter school for children in grades K-3 in the near future.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Faced with the challenge of declining student achievement in Garfield and Friendship, community and church leaders opened **The Neighborhood Academy**. The Academy is a private school dedicated to serving students in grades 8-12 who come from low-income families. Families pay tuition on a

³ "City's oldest charter schools are thriving, but only 1 of 3 meets federal standards." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 10/03/05.

⁴ "New Life for Old Schools." *Pittsburgh Business Times*, 02/10/06

sliding scale (everyone must pay at least \$50 a month⁵). In addition, parents must commit to ongoing volunteer service in the school. Thus, the Academy addresses two challenges: education and communication across generational lines.

The Neighborhood Academy started as an after-school program in 1993. The after-school program was expanded to a five-week summer intensive program, before the founders of the program were able to get grants from private foundations to open a year-round school. Opened in 2001, the Neighborhood Academy now boasts 100% college acceptance for its graduates.

BEYOND SCHOOLS – OTHER RESOURCES FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Youth Places sponsors several free after-school opportunities for youth. Programs include: tutoring and mentoring programs at the Warrington and St. Clair Recreation Centers; Summer Jobs Program for Youth; Mentoring, counseling and guidance about education and job training programs at the Community College of Allegheny County; Community service work; Small business development program for young adults; Job-training programs run by the Bidwell Training Center in Manchester (e.g., carpentry).



Mural at Arlington Gym

One Vision One Life is a regional violence reduction initiative that runs programs at the Warrington Recreation Center. Programs include a five-week summer education, recreation, and community service program for children ages 9-18.

One Small Step works with the public schools to provide after-school activities for students in grades 1-12. It also provides an intensive six-week summer education and recreation program that includes tutoring, life-skills training (e.g., financial planning), job readiness counseling, and employment opportunities for older students.

⁵ "Private Inner-City School Opening" *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 09/17/01.

Hilltop Health Ministries is a faith-based organization of pastors and volunteers from six congregations in Allentown, Arlington, Beltzhoover, Knoxville, and Mount Oliver. The Ministries meets the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of people of all ages, with an emphasis on improving the health and safety of youth and young mothers.



Mural at Warrington Recreation Center

Adults can support the efforts of the youth programs that currently exist, and adults can be a resource themselves. As active community members, we can use our life experience and career skills to help our children and young adults succeed. We can provide mentorship, help with financial planning, training in job skills, career counseling, and support for young parents.

Some residents have expressed skepticism about the overall impact of these programs. In addition the adults who run these programs are concerned that they do not have enough contact with the adults in our community. When we think about what our youth and young adults will need to be successful, it is good to identify the resources that are currently available. However, just as we may be able to do more if our neighborhoods work together, our community's resource providers will work better if they are working together and working with residents.

Recently, a program in Harlem (New York) has been drawing national attention for its strategy of creating a coordinated network of resources to address the challenges facing the youth in its community. Instead of developing a new resource provider for children and parents in Harlem, one organization chose to act as a coordinator of all the youth and parenting programs that exist in Harlem. The Harlem Children's Zone is an initiative that coordinates all the

programs in a sixty-block area of Harlem to create a “net woven so tight that no child can slip through.”

In our own community we have organizations, like the Hilltop Health Ministries, that work to provide services across our neighborhoods. We also have an organization, the **Beltzhoover Inter-Agency Network** (BIN), which sponsors events that facilitate collaboration across neighborhoods and across generations. BIN brings residents together to learn about existing agencies that serve South Pittsburgh. One Small Step youth help at these events and parents learn about support services. Everyone shares a meal at the end of the evening.

THE CRITICAL YEARS: SOME EDUCATION AND JOB RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

Adults in our Neighborhoods

Bidwell Training Center (Manchester)

Goodwill Careerlinks (Southside)

Hilltop Health Ministries

One Vision One Life (Mercy Behavioral Health/Warrington Recreation Centers)

One Small Step

Pittsburgh Public Schools Extended Learning Camps

Urban Youth Action

YouthPlaces (Warrington and St, Clair Recreation Centers)

No single program or organization can do everything. For example, with tutoring, athletics, and life-skills training, our recreation centers may already be taking on too much. But if we open up the lines of communication between residents and resource providers, we can actively coordinate the efforts of community programs. We can make sure that every program is helping us achieve the Action Agenda that we have developed together.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 5

How we can better coordinate existing resources to provide the opportunities that our youth need to succeed?

REVITALIZING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

“Our Neighborhoods are emptying out”

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS (CDCs)

Affordable homeownership is the foundation of a healthy community. In the neighborhoods of South Pittsburgh homeownership is on the decline. Residents can address this challenge by working with Community Development Corporations (CDCs). Community Development Corporations help residents coordinate local housing, employment, and business development. Services provided by CDCs include:

- Buying and managing property on behalf of the residents of a community.
- Working with financial institutions and government agencies (Urban Redevelopment Authority [URA], Housing and Urban Development [HUD]) to make sure that new and restored housing is made available to people with low-and-moderate incomes.
- Providing homeownership education for first-time homebuyers with low-and-moderate incomes.

CDCs in South Pittsburgh offer these and other services, but they often suffer from inadequate staffing and limited involvement from residents and businesses. Active residents can guide the efforts of these programs, while a professional staff is needed to implement programs in an effective way. To help our CDCs become stronger we will need to think about how they can get the resources they will need to maintain a professional staff that will work on behalf of residents.

As we think about how to move forward, we will want to learn more about the initiatives of our neighborhoods' CDCs, and we will want to think about how our CDCs can work together across our neighborhoods. Most importantly, we will need to think about how residents can work to make sure our CDCs have the resources they need to do good work for the community.

Successful CDCs in other communities have taken years to develop into organizations that can provide complicated services such as real estate

development and management. Successful CDCs in other communities have received help from “intermediaries” such as the **Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development** and the **Community Technical Assistance Center** (See Appendix B for more information about these resources). The help that intermediaries can provide, however, relies on the participation, guidance, and long-term commitment of active residents.

SOME SOUTH PITTSBURGH AREA COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Allentown CDC

Carrick Business Association

Arlington Civic Association

Mt. Oliver Chamber of Commerce

Arlington Community Council

Mt. Oliver Borough CDC

Arlington Heights Tenant Council

St. Clair Tenants Council

Beltzhoover Citizens CDC

Neighborhood Block Watches

Beltzhoover Neighborhood Council

Carrick Community Council

BUSINESS DISTRICTS AND PUBLIC SPACES

“I want to be able to walk down Brownsville Road again”

On a daily basis we share a lot. We ride the same buses, we shop in the same stores, and we eat in the same restaurants along major streets like Brownsville Road and Warrington Avenue. We also share the same disappointment when walking past boarded-up storefronts.



Brownsville Road: Mt. Oliver

There are things we can do together to revitalize our business districts and public spaces. Some groups already work together to organize cross-neighborhood clean-up days. But the larger vision of revitalizing business districts and public spaces may demand an organized advocacy and marketing strategy.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania offers the **Main Street/Elm Street** program, which provides money for communities to revitalize business districts and the residential neighborhoods directly connected to them. Main St./Elm St. channels money through Community Development Corporations or similar organizations with professional staff devoted to realizing a plan developed by the residents of a community.

Although each of our neighborhoods is unique, to most outsiders we are a single “market.” We can spend time working to correct the perception of these outsiders, or, like other communities have done, we can use this perception to our advantage. We could create a shared marketing strategy and business development plan based on the community’s Action Agenda. With a shared plan we could attract new businesses and attract public and private development resources.

Neighborhoods in the East End have worked together to attract major retailers and grocery stores to East Liberty over the last decade (Borders Books, Home Depot, Whole Foods, Trader Joes market). Several neighborhoods coordinated their efforts toward a business development strategy. Having a common strategy enables community groups to negotiate with potential investors and

convince them that an investment in one place is an investment in a larger market of potential customers.

Collaboration in the East End has attracted money from private foundations as well. Recently, East Liberty, Friendship, Garfield, and Lawrenceville have received major funding from a private foundation to redevelop a three-mile stretch of the Penn Avenue business district – from East Liberty all the way to the Strip District.



Brownsville Road: Carrick

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 6

As residents, how can we work together to promote revitalization in our communities?

THE FEDERAL WEED AND SEED INITIATIVE

To revitalize our neighborhoods we will have to draw on many resources. Through its Weed and Seed Initiative, the U. S. Department of Justice (USDOD) could provide our neighborhoods with \$1 million dollars over five years to help us move forward with a shared Action Agenda.

The Weed and Seed Initiative supports comprehensive plans that address crime and promote community revitalization. Plans supported by Weed and Seed must be developed by the whole community—residents, law enforcement officials, local government representatives, and social service providers—working together. A community’s Weed and Seed strategy explains how the whole community will work together to coordinate and manage resources, reduce crime, and revitalize their community.

WEED AND SEED IN OTHER COMMUNITIES

Over 300 communities nationwide have received Weed and Seed funding, including Pittsburgh’s Hill District from 1992-1995. In 1999, the National Institute of Justice conducted an evaluation of the effect of the Weed and Seed Initiative on eight communities. The study concluded the following:

- Communities (like the Hill District) whose residents were active in both the planning and coordination of the Weed and Seed strategy felt an increased sense of “safety” and had a more favorable perception of their neighborhood after the Initiative officially ended.
- Communities in which residents were less involved in planning of the Weed and Seed strategy responded to increased police activity less favorably.
- The study concluded that Weeding and Seeding strategies should start at the same time, especially in communities that may not have a positive relationship with law enforcement. Increased law enforcement activity that is not accompanied by programs to revitalize the community tends to reinforce pre-existing negative attitudes towards law enforcement.

HOW THE WEED AND SEED STRATEGY WORKS



STEERING COMMITTEE

A Community develops a Weed and Seed Steering Committee to coordinate the development and implementation of a Weed and Seed strategy. The Steering Committee includes residents, Federal, State, and local law enforcement officials, human service providers, and local business owners.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Attorney and local police, work with the Steering Committee. They help residents by identifying, arresting, prosecuting, and incarcerating violent criminals and drug traffickers.

Law enforcement officials also concentrate on increased neighborhood patrolling and ridding the community of illegal weapons. They may also develop special programs to address repeat-offenders, protect victim-witnesses, or prosecute organized criminal activity.

COMMUNITY POLICING

Community residents and law enforcement agencies develop programs that bring them together. Law enforcement agencies should encourage and welcome resident involvement, and residents should become involved by establishing programs like neighborhood watches, drug-free zones, and graffiti removal programs.

PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND TREATMENT

Residents work with the community's Weed and Seed Steering Committee, law enforcement agencies, social service providers, and business owners to identify resources in the community that can be used to address prevention, intervention, and treatment. Plans supported by the Weed and Seed Initiative must include a "Safe Haven" site—a centralized location in the community that provides access to an array of human services.

NEIGHBORHOOD RESTORATION

Residents work with the community's Weed and Seed Steering Committee, law enforcement agencies, social service providers, and business owners to expand local businesses, improve existing housing, and clean up the neighborhood. In a

Weed and Seed strategy, short-term action should be part of long-term plans for ongoing development.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF WEED AND SEED

1. COLLABORATION

Plans supported by the Federal Weed and Seed Initiative include involvement from Federal, State, and Local “crime-fighting agencies”, social service providers, public representatives, business owners, and residents

2. COMMUNICATION

Plans supported by the Federal Weed and Seed Initiative have clearly established lines of communication among community residents, law enforcement officials, public representatives, social service providers, and business owners. This communication is maintained during the planning and implementation of the community’s Weed and Seed strategy.

3. COORDINATION

Plans supported by the Federal Weed and Seed Initiative clearly identify the resources available in a community and explain how these resources will work together to reduce crime and promote revitalization in the community

4. COOPERATION

Plans supported by the Federal Weed and Seed Initiative explain how residents, social service providers, and business owners will work with Local, State, and Federal officials to devise and implement plans to Weed out crime and Seed the community with social and economic initiatives that will achieve ongoing, long-term improvement to the quality of life in the community.

CITIZENS UNDERSTAND THEIR PROBLEMS,
PERCEIVE THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER,
AND THEY BELIEVE IN THEIR CAPACITY TO ACT.

SOUTH PITTSBURGH WEED AND SEED

A steering committee has come together to create a Weed and Seed plan. Subcommittees generated many of the ideas presented in this booklet. Below is the structure we have been working with

STEERING COMMITTEE

Our Steering Committee is made up of residents, the U.S. Attorney for the Western Pennsylvania District, local elected officials, law enforcement officials, community-based service organizations.

CITY OF PITTSBURGH WEED AND SEED OFFICE

The Office of the Mayor oversees Weed and Seed Initiatives. The Directors of the Pittsburgh office have been active participants at all of our meetings.

WEED AND SEED SUBCOMMITTEES

Subcommittees include residents who volunteer their time to describe the challenges in our community and to identify the resources that we can use to meet these challenges.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPIC 7

What input can we provide to make sure our Weed and Seed plan adequately addresses the needs of our community?

NEXT STEPS: COMMUNITY CONVERSATION, JULY 21, 2007

THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION INCLUDES 5 ELEMENTS

Participants willing to be respectful to one another but honest about the issues being discussed

1. Balanced information about the issues (including this booklet)
2. Discussion in small groups, documented for the community by trained facilitators
3. An opportunity for residents to pose questions to Resource Partners who have expertise in dealing with the kinds of challenges facing our community
4. At the end of the day, participants complete a survey, which serves as an opportunity to share their unique perspective



Potters House Ministries 430 Cathedral Street (Formerly St. Joseph's Convent)

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOPICS

1. How can we encourage people to get more involved in our communities?
2. What is the best way for us to coordinate the activities of the many groups operating in our neighborhoods?
3. How, if at all, can the mayor's new programs help build trust and strengthen relationships between residents and police?
4. What is the best way for our community associations (e.g., block watches) to work together, along with police, to prevent crimes from occurring?
5. How we can better coordinate existing resources to provide the opportunities that our youth need to succeed?
6. As residents, how can we work together to promote revitalization in our communities?
7. What input can we provide to make sure our Weed and Seed plan adequately addresses the needs of our community?

APPENDIX A: RESOURCE PARTNERS

The following people and organizations gave interviews and supplied information for this booklet.

Mark Bibro, Vice President and General Manager
River Walk Corporate Center

Dennis Brooks, Executive Director
One Small Step/Beltzhoover Interagency Network

Uwe Calloway, Director
YouthPlaces
Warrington Recreation Center

Richard Carrington, Executive Director
Voices Against Violence

Sandra Duceour, Site Coordinator
Family Care Connections Mt. Oliver
Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

Josette Fitzgibbons, Principal Planner
The Department of City Planning

Judy Hackel, President
Allentown Community Development Corporation

Carey Harris, Executive Director
A+ Schools

Maureen Hogan, Deputy Director
Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development

Noor Ismael, Director
Department of City Planning

Dawn King
Beltzhoover Neighborhood Council
Staff, Councilman Jeffrey S. Koch

Richard King, Judge
Magisterial District 5-3-14

Jane Miller, Director of Community and Governmental Relations
Mercy Behavioral Health

Cathy Moir, Owner
Moir Computer Associates

Mary Phan-Gruber, Executive Director
Birmingham Foundation

John Pierce, Director of Information Systems
Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Robert Stumpp, Senior Policy Manager
Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Samuel Wright, Deacon
International Ministries

APPENDIX B: RESOURCES FOR OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Below you will find information about some of the resources discussed in this booklet.

A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education

425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1850

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

412.258.2660

www.aplusschools.org

A+ Schools is a community advocate for improving student achievement by supporting an action agenda shaped by the issues of high standards, quality teaching, leadership accountability, financial responsibility and community involvement. Our purpose is to regularly report back to the public and engage a range of community partners in the effort to improve the educational outcomes of public school students. Their web-site provides publications about local public school achievement, as well as links to national reports and information concerning quality public school education. They encourage, support, and create opportunities for residents and schools to work together.

Three key aspects of A+ will make a genuine difference in our public school situation:

- * A vocal leadership that makes clear this community's high expectations for performance and accountability of its school system
- * Developing genuine community engagement in both the issues and the activities undertaken by the organization
- * Resource support from community institutions and businesses, the future of which depend on the excellence of the products of our education system, our children

Citizens Police Academy

Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Training Academy

Washington Blvd. at Negley Run

Pittsburgh, PA 15206

412-665-3600

The Pittsburgh Citizen's Police Academy draws the police and the community closer together in a setting that brings the sense of police training to each participant.

During the twelve-week academy session, citizen members receive three hours of training one evening each week in the varied functions of law enforcement. They experience firsthand some of the highlights of police training and are exposed to the real inside workings of the police bureau. Participants are taught the basics of criminal law, search and seizure, patrol tactics, firearms and other subjects. They participate in the investigation of a crime scene, experience a traffic stop, and see how police canines are used. Academy members meet and talk with many of the street officers as well as the command staff that serves them.

Instructors are all law enforcement professionals who teach both veteran and recruit police officers. Students come away from this training with a deeper understanding of the police mission, and with increased ability to see what the police can do to serve the community. Citizen's Police Academy students are selected by the Chief of Police through a nomination process. Citizens may also nominate themselves by completing an application. Enrollment is limited to approximately 30 students per session.

Community Technical Assistance Center (CTAC)

901 Western Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15233
(412) 231-CTAC (2822)
www.ctaonline.org

CTAC is committed to building and strengthening effective community-based organizations through training, individualized consulting services, referrals, and publications. A non-profit corporation, CTAC develops strong communities by providing technical assistance to neighborhood groups, tenant councils, community-based organizations and community development corporations in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Services include:

Organizational Development: Designed to strengthen the structure of community organizations and expand the skills of the people in them.

Community Organizing: New in Summer 2006, CTAC will help organizations with hands-on community organizing in the field.

Community Data: Using PDAs, we collect first-hand, street-level data, package it, and then work with communities to analyze it and put it to work for community revitalization.

Communications and Advocacy: As a center-point for the regional community development field, CTAC serves as a source for sharing information and building consensus on issues affecting community development.

Main Street/Elm Street Program (Pennsylvania Downtown Center)

130 Locust Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-233-4675
www.padowntown.org

The Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated solely to the revitalization of the Commonwealth's Core or traditional communities. It provides communities interested in the revitalization of their central business districts and surrounding residential neighborhoods with outreach, technical assistance and educational services.

The **Main Street Program** is a comprehensive, community-based revitalization approach. The five-year program encourages revitalization by leveraging private dollars and requiring ongoing, local

support evidenced by the establishment of an organization and documented financial commitment from the community.

The **Elm Street Program** provides funds for planning, technical assistance and physical improvements to residential and mixed use areas in proximity to central business districts.

Both programs incorporate volunteer support, the leveraging of private dollars, strategic planning, rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings, as well as streetscape improvements. These programs provide funds to Municipalities and Redevelopment Authorities In certain cases, non-profit Main Street and economic development organizations, as well as Neighborhood and Business Improvement Districts are also eligible applicants.

Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development

Regional Enterprise Tower
425 Sixth Avenue
Suite 1740
Pittsburgh, PA
15219-1840
412.471.3727
www.ppnd.org

The mission of the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development (PPND) is to develop tolerant, mixed-income communities of choice in the city of Pittsburgh – in short, to create “healthy” communities. Healthy communities are created by exploiting opportunities and instigating change: by identifying and attracting new markets and new resident populations; by creating new jobs that have traction in today’s economy; by making communities desirable places to live. Dilapidated, dangerous places once abandoned by the market are reinvigorated. New and diverse populations, lured by the sociability and eclecticism of these communities, transform places that had languished for years. In short, healthy communities are viable choices for families, employees and businesses.

APPENDIX C: NEWSPAPER ARTICLES (COMMUNITY POLICING AND SCHOOLS)

COMMUNITY POLICING

City Aims 7 Programs at Violence

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Wednesday, May 09, 2007

City officials unveiled seven programs that will be used to combat violence in the city. An eighth program, use of surveillance cameras, is under study.

Beat cops: Foot and bicycle patrols will cover neighborhood business districts. The 30 officers deployed citywide will make contact with business owners, document activities and do follow-up. Problem areas in each of the city's police zones will be targeted.

CitizenObserver: A program already up and running on the North Side, it will be expanded citywide. It allows law enforcement to use a Web-based alert system to inform the community almost immediately about crime or other important information.

Adopt A Block: In this faith-based initiative, churches or other religious entities adopt an area around their facilities and work to enhance it and make it safe. The program originally started with nine churches and will be expanded.

C-TIPS (Community's Technical Investigative and Preparedness Section): This ongoing program utilizes a dedicated squad of detectives whose goal is to develop relationships with community leaders to fight crime and promote safety.

Anonymous 311 tip line: The mayor's tip line will now take anonymous calls related to crime and give them to the police department.

Anti-crime cabinet: The mayor plans to convene a panel of public safety experts, as well as community and religious leaders to work toward eliminating crime.

Faith-based initiative breakfast: The mayor plans in the next few weeks to invite local religious leaders from throughout the city to gather with him to talk about the issues of crime and violence and solicit their help.

Citizens Play Key Role in Curbing Crime (excerpt)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Sunday, May 06, 2007

By Diana Nelson Jones

Garfield's public-safety task force was for years the most assertive of any civilian group in the area fighting crime, getting in the face of offenders and public officials alike. Today, it could be the model for what everyone else is doing. Certainly, few neighborhood groups draw representatives of the

district attorney's office, the city Bureau of Building Inspection, probation officers and other enforcement officials to meetings, as Garfield's does. Few advocates are as tenacious and aggressive as Aggie Brose, who founded the group more than a decade ago.

But police say they have noticed a surge in public safety vigilance among a growing number of neighborhood groups in the city, with tactics, organization and follow-through that are savvy and effective. From making use of cell phones and e-mail for reporting crimes to old-fashioned gum-shoe work, from neighborhood patrols to impact statements in courts, citizen groups are asserting themselves.

Drops in crime rates are due to many factors, and there is no way to document the effect of the various community groups. But police and neighborhood activists say they see results -- in the arrests and convictions of individuals, and in more general ways that include a greater sense of control and security on the part of residents.

Communication is key

The old phone chain has given way to e-mail blasts. Block watch coordinators and their local public safety officers often have each others' cell phone numbers and sometimes talk daily. Most groups meet monthly with the officer, study the updated crime report and plan actions against hot spots.

For years, members of North Side Safe Streets have intermittently held their meetings at sites the police are often called to, including a playground. Officer Forrest Hodges said the 20 neighborhood groups he meets with have been instrumental in making the North Side safer, noting that the North Side has had an 11 percent decrease in part-one crimes (the most serious) from May 2005 to March 2007.

Citizen car patrols were uncommon when Squirrel Hill started its highly touted roving squad 12 years ago. Lawrenceville residents have been patrolling their streets for several years, reporting such things as parties in abandoned houses, groups of youth spray-painting on walls and the location of a drug deal. Today, residents in dozens of neighborhoods are driving around slowly, two to a car, spying on notorious places and reporting suspicious or criminal behavior to police. Police train them how to be furtive and effective and when to hand off.

Fear is still a factor, but even that is changing.

"I've known little old ladies who used be so scared to go out to block watches, they'd peek through their curtains," said City Councilman Len Bodack, whose district stretches from Lawrenceville to Stanton Heights. "The same ladies will open the door and yell, 'Get the hell out of there.'"

Residents are becoming more assertive, said Grady Roberts Jr., a lifelong resident of Garfield and member of its public safety task force.

"There seems to be an informal agreement of zero tolerance for anti-social behavior" in the anti-crime groups, he said. He also believes that the task force has played a part in the economic upswing starting in Garfield.

Hidden cameras helped Lawrenceville solve a rash of tire slashings in recent years.

Groups in Councilman Bill Pedoto's district have become savvier, "without a doubt," he said. He used Jet Lefean, of the Schenley Farms Neighborhood Watch, as an example.

"He takes the time. He tracks graffiti and does it very successfully."

Mr. Lefean also has followed culprits to their court dates and pleaded with judges on behalf of his neighborhood.

"What's not well-known," said Mr. Lefean, "is that when someone has an arraignment and bail is set, an established neighborhood organization can give a community impact statement."

Schenley Farms followed Lawrenceville's lead and installed surveillance cameras "where people have complained about illegal operations. They're legal as long as there is no sound."

Jean O'Neil, of the National Crime Prevention Council, said citizen vigilance has been steadily improving, and believes it has a role in the declining property crime rates over the last three decades.

"We've done a remarkable job in increasing crime reports, especially property crime, which makes up the bulk of crime" and includes burglary.

Residents also form bonds through crime-fighting efforts.

"It builds solidarity," said Angele Ellis, a resident of Friendship and member of the task force in Garfield. "Our huge success last year was the closing of the Horoscope Lounge," a nuisance bar at Penn Avenue and Graham Street. "That has made a tremendous difference, particularly for residents along that stretch. The people were living in a state of siege.

"One night before the bar was closed, we had a candlelight vigil because a bullet had lodged in one of the doors."

Ms. Brose said she believes the police and building inspectors are doing their jobs, but that overburdened judicial and correctional systems fail to keep offenders from victimizing neighborhoods.

North Side Safe Streets was established in 2001 as a result of a string of burglaries, said Kimberly Flaherty, its coordinator. "We had a public safety meeting and 200 people came. The mayor's office, the police, [then Councilman] Sala Udin, the zone commander. We formed after that."

Officer Hodges said the typical reaction to a flurry of crime is a jump in neighborhood action, "then once problems start going away, people do, too. I don't see that happening anymore on the North Side.

"It's amazing once you start looking around at the involvement that goes on. It's no wonder the crime rate is dropping. As long as people stay at it."

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SCHOOLS

City's oldest charter schools are thriving, but only 1 of 3 meets federal standards (excerpt)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Monday, October 03, 2005

By Amy McConnell Schaarsmith

While Pittsburgh Public Schools struggles with too many empty seats, the city's first three charter schools are at or near capacity, with waiting lists of hundreds of students. Officials at the three schools -- Manchester Academic Charter School on the North Side, Northside Urban Pathways Charter School in Downtown's Cultural District and Urban League of Pittsburgh Charter School in East Liberty -- say that some parents and mainstream public school officials remain skeptical of charter schools, which first opened in Pittsburgh in 1998.

Manchester Academic is the only one of the three that performed well enough on state math and reading tests given in the spring to meet the adequate progress standards under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. About two weeks ago, Urban League was given a warning, the first step, and Northside Urban Pathways was placed in School Improvement I, the next step, which provides for school choice.

Under state legislation passed in 1997, charter schools are independent public schools authorized by the school district in whose territory they are located. By law, districts must pay charter schools for each student they enroll from that district. Charter schools are required to meet the same state standards as regular public schools for student safety, teacher certification and academic performance. In Pittsburgh, the first three charter schools created under state law have demonstrated variable success on standardized tests, with scores ranging widely from school to school . . .

At Manchester Academic Charter, which serves kindergarten through eighth grade, state reading and math test scores were mediocre for a few years, but in the past two years they have rivaled those in some of the most popular city school district magnet programs. The school emphasizes technology and Spanish instruction, offers an advanced math and reading track, and provides lessons in violin and piano in addition to other electives. Classes are limited to 20 students per grade, for a school of 180 students. In middle school, the classes are broken into two sections of no more than 10 students to give them more individual time with teachers.

At Urban League of Pittsburgh Charter, which serves kindergarten through fifth grade, school officials have struggled to bring up the test scores of its approximately 220 students, about 95 percent of whom are considered low-income under federal guidelines. In the past two years, fewer than a quarter of fifth-graders have been able to show on state tests that they were proficient or better at reading. In math, just 5 percent of fifth-graders were able to show proficiency last year, but 38 percent were able to do so this year.

Ms. Edwards said she and her staff work to develop their students' character with lessons in respect for one another and diligence. They offer Spanish and Japanese language instruction, Afrocentric social studies, yoga, ballet and drama. They require parents or another adult family member to volunteer 30 hours a year at the school. They develop special education plans, complete with goals for each child, with parents' help.

How they fared

Like other public schools, the three oldest charter schools in the city must give their students the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests. The results were used to determine whether the schools made adequate yearly progress — known as AYP — under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Manchester Academic Charter School met the mark. However, Urban League was put on the warning list, the first step for missing AYP. Northside Urban Pathways entered School Improvement I, which is the second step. Pittsburgh Public Schools were placed in School Improvement II, the third step.

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New Life for Closed Schools (excerpt)

Pittsburgh Business Times February 10, 2006
by Robert Sandler

Two closed Pittsburgh public schools are on the auction block and are expected to sell over the next few months. The school board has hired Downtown real estate brokerage Langholz Wilson Ellis Inc. to market the schools. Langholz is pitching the schools -- located on the South Side and in Regent Square -- as conversion projects, most likely for residential condominiums or apartments.

A third school, on Ridge Avenue on the North Side, also was slated to be put up for auction, but superintendent Mark Roosevelt wants the building to house the school district's Talented and Gifted program. The two buildings could also be used as schools again, if a charter school group wanted to purchase them, said J. Keefe Ellis and Mike Liguori, both of Langholz Wilson Ellis.

While developers are interested in revamping the buildings, they do have some major challenges, including health hazards and a lack of parking, Ellis said. The schools have asbestos problems in their floor tiles and window caulking, and the Regent Square and South Side schools have lead-based paint.

The school board is using appraisals to set the minimum bid for each of the three buildings currently on the block. Ranging from \$816,000 to \$2.5 million, the schools don't come cheap, and all have environmental problems that must be remediated if the buildings are used for anything other than a school. Bids are due on the Regent Square school by March 1, and for the South Side high school March 31.

The Regent Square school, adjacent to Frick Park, backs up to the tennis courts on Braddock Avenue. The South Side school is at East Carson Street and South 10th Street, at the edge of the business district and not far from Station Square. Eve Picker, whose Downtown-based no wall productions development corp. has redeveloped many small buildings into apartments and condominiums throughout the area, said she's interested in rehabbing the South Side and Regent Square schools but wouldn't elaborate on what she would do with them. Jim Aiello Jr., owner of Strip District-based Aiello Development Co., took the former Holy Family school in Lawrenceville and turned it into the Catalyst office building two years ago. Downtown-based developer Ralph Falbo said he was interested in turning the South Side and Regent Square schools into condominiums.

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