

McKees Rocks Pennsylvania

December 11–16, 2016



McKees Rocks Pennsylvania

Rebuilding the Working Communities of McKees Rocks
and Esplen

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About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 40,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 76 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision making is based on its members sharing expertise on

a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2016 alone, more than 3,200 events were held in 340 cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

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About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 600 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and non-profit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration,

participants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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The McKees Rocks CDC gave us huge amounts of their time, supplied us with mountains of information, and were always ready to discuss and answer questions with us.

The panel would also like to thank the many stakeholders from McKees Rocks, Esplen, and the greater Pittsburgh region. This group of interviewees included elected officials, local business owners, community members, faith leaders, and municipal and state staff members. Throughout the week, the ULI panel was continually impressed by McKees Rocks and Esplen's entrepreneurial and rich cultural history and commitment to improving their community.

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Background and the Panel's Assignment

ONCE HOME TO MORE THAN 18,000 PEOPLE,

McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, suffered the loss of businesses and population in the 1970s and 1980s. As of July 1, 2015, the population was 6,053, and the city has lost population every year since 2010. The median household income within McKees Rocks is \$23,656 and nearly 33 percent of the population within McKees Rocks lives below the federal poverty line, which is defined as \$12,060 for an individual or \$24,600 for a family of four. The city of Pittsburgh, which is included within the study area, is the second largest city in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania (304,391 in 2015). Over the past few years, Pittsburgh has seen slight population growth. The region's population has remained steady at nearly 2.4 million residents, a size that makes it the 26th most populous region in the United States.

The borough of McKees Rocks and the city of Pittsburgh's Esplen neighborhood are located near Brunot Island at the confluence of Chartiers Creek and the Ohio River. Chartiers Avenue, which is also State Route 51, is a major connection to the western suburbs of Allegheny County. The Esplen neighborhood is primarily residential but has a mix of industrial users such as mechanics, warehouses, and a trucking company.

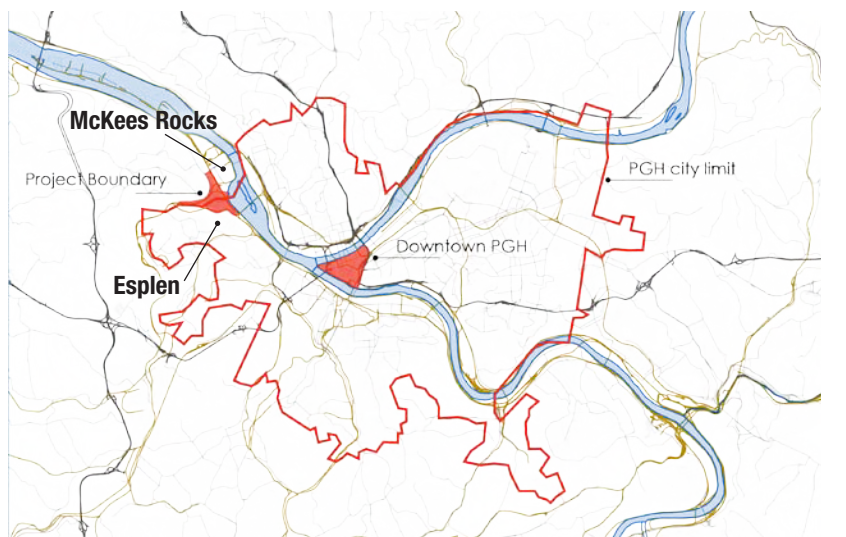
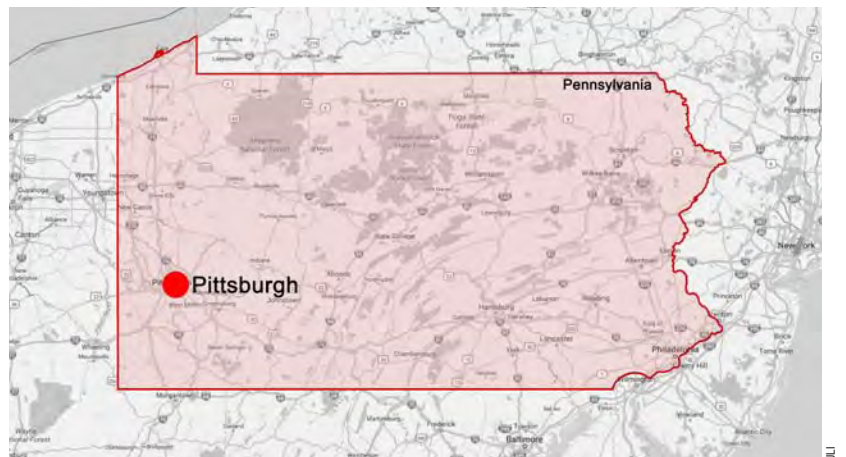
A \$60 million CSX Intermodal Facility is under construction, with an expected completion date of mid-2017. The facility will put McKees Rocks at the center of shipping in western Pennsylvania through the CSX's intermodal freight rail system. This facility will improve connections between Mid-Atlantic ports and Midwestern customers through the main CSX intermodal facility in northern Ohio. The McKees Rocks facility will have two processing tracks, a support track, and a lead track. Warehouse and administration buildings will be constructed on site and will be close to additional land owned by Trinity Development as well as

the Luffy family, which is developing a small industrial park nearby.

Study Area

The study area measures about 200 acres and includes the commercial core within the borough of McKees Rocks, lower Chartiers Avenue, and the former site of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie (P&LE) Railroad currently owned

The study area includes downtown McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, and the Esplen neighborhood within the city of Pittsburgh.





Detailed map of the study area.

by Trinity Development. The Esplen neighborhood, within the city of Pittsburgh, is also included within the study area along with waterfront along Chartiers Creek that is under-used land owned by the public water utility, ALCOSAN, and is accessible through Pittsburgh's Sheraden neighborhood.

The Panel's Assignment

The McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation (CDC), the borough, and several additional stakeholders

from local and regional agencies are seeking recommendations from ULI regarding reinvestment, land use, social equity, and poverty. The panel was asked to respond to multiple questions under the three main goals:

■ **The market and placemaking.** Provide forward-looking economic analysis, site analysis, and design for a sustainable, resilient, and equitable development for the McKees Rocks and Esplen communities. This should focus on the market potential rather than just the current market capacity and should recommend strategies for creating a dynamic and vibrant community that attracts new residents and boosts quality of life.

- How does the existing market potential reflect stakeholder-desired outcomes within the McKees Rocks and Esplen communities?
- How does regional development occurring along the Ohio River affect the study area (e.g., the Shell Ethane Cracker plant in Beaver County, renewal of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods, and so on)?
- What are effective mixed-income housing models that provide options for dislocated residents and keep some units affordable while maximizing the value of other units and creating a sustainably healthy neighborhood?
- How should the study area, including McKees Rocks and Pittsburgh's Esplen neighborhood, balance manufacturing, logistics, and industrial growth to ensure coexistence with residential and retail spaces?
- What are examples of communities that have used placemaking activities to strengthen revitalization efforts?

■ **Transportation, connections, and the physical landscape.** Recommend strategies and provide examples that both take advantage of the expanding role of the study area within the global freight network and create an environment that is safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other nonfreight-related users. Recommend strategies to better connect with the Chartiers Creek and Ohio River.

- What additional amenities, infrastructure, or connections to assets or natural resources (i.e., waterways, bike trails, and green spaces) need to be created to make the study area an attractive community for residents and workers across income lines?
 - How can or should the study area better take advantage of freight and cargo opportunities that can be based on our existing industrial, multimodal, infrastructure? In addition, how can planners ensure that the resulting traffic created enables safe walkable and bikable neighborhoods?
 - How can the study area optimize the external and internal transportation connections, both for personal and for freight and commercial concerns?
 - What role should be played by bike and pedestrian connectivity, transit-oriented development, and potential usage of the waterways?
 - What are effective strategies to overcome physical barriers such as railroad right of ways or waterways?
 - How should the study area prepare for an increase in extreme weather and the likelihood of increased flooding and weather-related disasters?
 - **Implementation.** Establish a timeline and steps necessary to ensure the achievement of a defined vision for the study area. Recommend strategies that will help the sponsors better engage with community residents and stakeholders across the Pittsburgh region.
 - How can development of target sites be best structured and phased to catalyze development of future phases as well as adjacent areas in the community without jeopardizing existing surrounding concerns? Should phasing plans be developed through a focus on uses or geography?
 - How can land use recommendations from ULI inform the upcoming overhaul of borough zoning ordinances, and is it possible to advance these rezoning efforts before the completion of the master plan that is to be developed upon the ULI feedback? Also, should the borough consider form-based zoning?
 - Can an appropriate site be identified for a new mixed-use building for a key partner on an advanced timetable in this development area before the creation of the upcoming master plan?
 - What steps should be taken to ensure revitalization of the study area would positively affect renewal efforts of surrounding communities, such as the Bottoms in McKees Rocks?
- The panel further distilled areas of study into the following issues and questions:
- What uses will the market support in the study area, and how should the region approach making the uses work together?
 - How does the McKees Rocks/Esplen community better connect itself—physically, socially, and financially—both internally and to the region?
 - What are strategies for addressing needs in housing, safety, infrastructure, and transportation?
 - What are the steps to a successful implementation?

Introduction and Key Recommendations

The McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation has done a good job of building momentum to spur growth, and the community may be nearing an inflection point. The panel thinks successfully navigating to the next level will require taking stock of how the McKees Rocks CDC, the borough of McKees Rocks, and the community work together to take on the future.

THE POPULATION DECLINE within McKees Rocks and the Pittsburgh region has had a detrimental impact on McKees Rocks and Esplen. However, in the last few years, Pittsburgh has begun to experience modest population growth. This report provides a blueprint for a land use plan that better reflects the underlying attributes of the diverse communities of McKees Rocks and Esplen. The hope is that, like other redeveloping neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, McKees Rocks and Esplen will rebound.

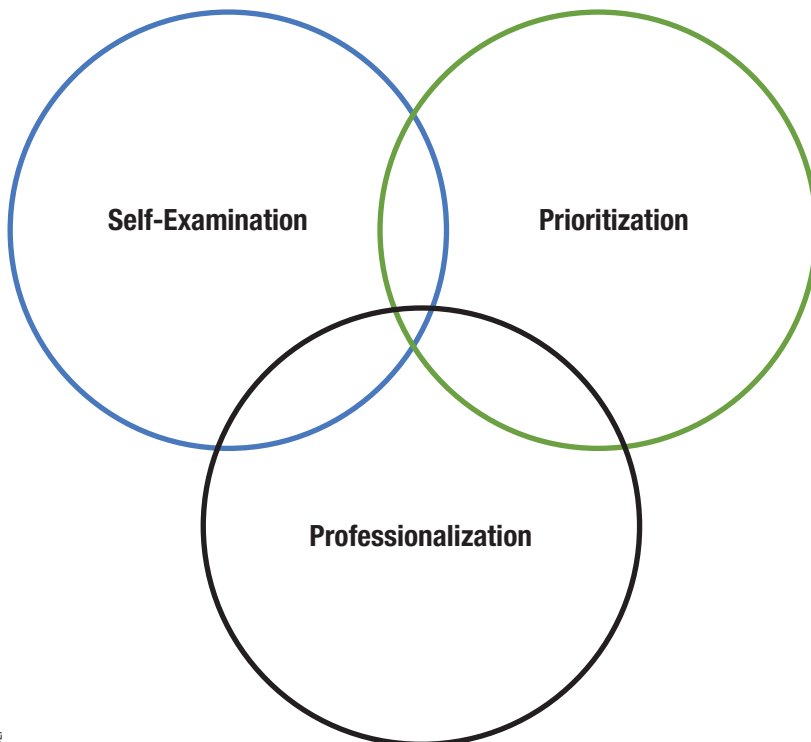
This report is intended to provide a study of current market conditions of the study area and recommend steps on how the McKees Rocks CDC, the borough of McKees Rocks, the South West Pittsburgh CDC, the city of Pittsburgh, and other regional and state partners can conduct some self-examination, better prioritization, and professionaliza-

tion. The panelists paid close attention to the McKees Rocks CDC because they recognized the CDC as a primary mover of the study area. This report intends to help focus the CDC's mission so that other organizations can take the lead in areas that are not within the purview of the McKees Rocks CDC.

Keeping all the pieces moving while not becoming overwhelmed can be a difficult process for partners, but implementation can happen in a timely and effective manner when each step of the process is followed and stakeholders remain committed and engaged. Each set of authoritative bodies needs to be given adequate resources to succeed and must adhere to a strict timeline that dictates progress. Without a clear path for everyone to follow, miscommunication and competition for resources can obstruct prospective projects.

Focusing on the following areas will help strengthen the McKees Rocks and Esplen communities:

- Adopt more innovative thinking about what happens within the study area. For example, think of new ways to attract industrial, retail, and office businesses. In addition, consider how McKees Rocks and Esplen might best implement the plan collectively—not just by the McKees Rocks CDC—and in a way that showcases the unique characteristics of the study area. This effort will require leadership by the borough of McKees Rocks, Allegheny County, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, the city of Pittsburgh, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and its affiliate, the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, including its Department of Community and Economic Development.
- Reposition Hays Manor and the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing strip center in a way that works within market



conditions and that recognizes that change will take time. Large vertical mixed-use development will likely not occur within the near term. Instead, the communities should take steps to restore the street grid and create walkable streetscapes and public plazas. The study area should create a business association that will help support businesses in the near and mid terms. Such actions would provide the flexibility required to eventually enable the market to support small mixed-use development of either office or residential space over retail space.

- Expand residential use along Chartiers Creek, particularly on the McKees Rocks banks. This area should not just be a parking lot. Instead, the communities should take the opportunity to either create an extension of green that mirrors the Esplen side or to establish more active private use such as townhouses over a garage level.
- Parking should not be a driver for any development. Eventually, if lower Chartiers Avenue is revitalized as discussed within this report, then having a parking supply issue will signal that a great place has been developed. This is a good problem to have and something that should be considered over the longer term and addressed at a later date. Parking minimums should not be included with future zoning efforts.
- Thoughtful zoning should be completed to encourage the highest and best use of land and should establish strong, separated mixed-use (retail, office, limited residential) and industrial districts. Heavier industrial uses should take advantage of precious land. The area extending east of the McKees Rocks Bridge to just west of Hays Manor should leverage the coming CSX intermodal facility. In this area, heavier industrial uses should remain to the west; lighter industrial and more job-intensive uses should be concentrated to the east; and retail, mixed-use, and commercial uses should be limited to the lower Chartiers Avenue corridor/downtown McKees Rocks.

Key Recommendations

The panel makes the following recommendations to the policy groups in the study area.

- McKees Rocks and Esplen should be considered as one community during planning and execution of strategies.
- Improve the branding for McKees Rocks and Esplen to embrace the community's existing grittiness and working-class feel. The "New Town" name and concept should not be a part of this rebranding; instead, the name should better reflect the uniqueness and character of McKees Rocks.
- The community should restore the street grid by selectively demolishing a portion of Chartiers Crossing to connect the Hays Manor site to the broader community.
- Chartiers and Linden avenues are the key gateway to lower Chartiers Avenue. Where they meet is a good place for a public square or plaza.
- It is critical to finish the Roxian Theatre and leverage it with adjunct uses as a focal point for events and future programming.
- McKees Rocks CDC, Trinity Development, the borough of McKees Rocks, and regional partners should focus on attracting the right type of industrial uses to the former P&LE site. These would include small urban manufacturers rather than warehouse and distribution users, which might be easier to attract but would be less beneficial.
- The community should save available flat land for industrial uses ancillary to CSX and should keep trucks departing the facility on Island Avenue heading north away from downtown. Plans should discourage truck traffic from cutting through the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing or through the McKees Rocks downtown commercial core.
- Esplen should remain mostly residential. Some office units could be built along West Carson street.

- Senior housing should be added near lower Chartiers for easier access as part of the Hays Manor redevelopment strategy.
- The McKees Rocks CDC and others should engage the community through multiple avenues to celebrate and inform citizens. Efforts could include a CSX welcome party.
- Agencies and organizations should support immigration and refugee resettlement programs to quickly repopulate and stabilize McKees Rocks and Esplen.
- The McKees Rocks CDC should focus on
 - Homeownership, and
 - The downtown commercial core.
- The McKees Rocks and South West Pittsburgh CDCs should assist and advocate for, but not lead, important efforts related to
 - Industrial development,
 - Social services,
 - Communications,
 - Outdoor public space,
 - Waterfront improvements, and
 - Bikeways.
- The McKees Rocks CDC should help establish a small business association for the lower Chartiers Avenue businesses. Future industrial operations also could be a part of this association.
- The McKees Rocks CDC should conduct a demonstration project of model housing rehabilitation. The South West Pittsburgh CDC could also conduct a demonstration project.
- The borough of McKees Rocks should evaluate options to consolidate with Stowe Township and surrounding boroughs or to be annexed by the city of Pittsburgh.

Market Research and Economic Development

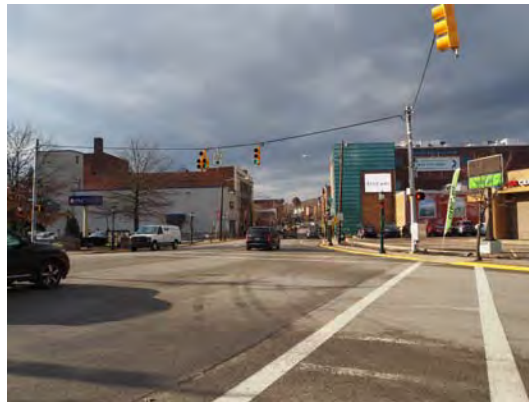
PITTSBURGH AND ITS INNER-RING SUBURBS are still stinging from a dramatic loss of population that is unlikely to return in the near future. However, over the past decade the region has experienced modest population growth that McKees Rocks is in a position to capture with thoughtful branding underpinned with deliberate land use planning and implementation.

To compete for the attention of those who live, work, and play in the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area, McKees Rocks and Esplen should embrace and capitalize on what makes it unique. For instance, pursuing big-box, national retailers on a large scale is unlikely to be successful and may be detrimental to any sense of unique community.

But embracing the grittiness (real or perceived) of McKees Rocks history and even the CSX intermodal facility and smaller footprint industrial uses could create an underground, insider's feel that will appeal to the artist and younger demographics that have been drawn to and grown with areas such as Lawrenceville and East Liberty. Hollywood Music & Sound Store and the town's annual "Feastival" are tangible manifestations of McKees Rocks' untold story. Both pull from outside the study area for the majority of their customer base and audience and have potential to grow and define the McKees Rocks brand.

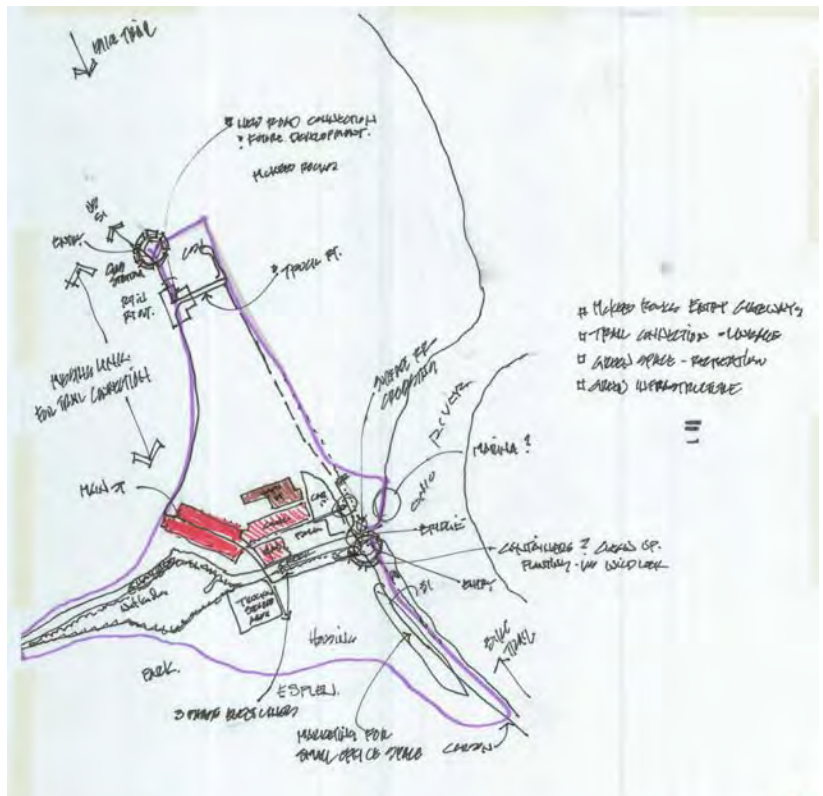
McKees Rocks draws outside customers for unique food options, including Pierogies Plus, Pasquarelli's Pizzeria, Doughboy's Pizza, Five Generation Bakery, and Mancini's Bakery. The McKees Rocks CDC should form a small business association (SBA) to provide small businesses with support and road maps to leverage the financial and support services available from regional governments and organizations.

The potential economic strength of McKees Rocks will lie in the diversification of its economy. In an economically



RALPH INOZUOLI

A view of lower Chartiers Avenue in McKees Rocks.



RALPH INOZUOLI

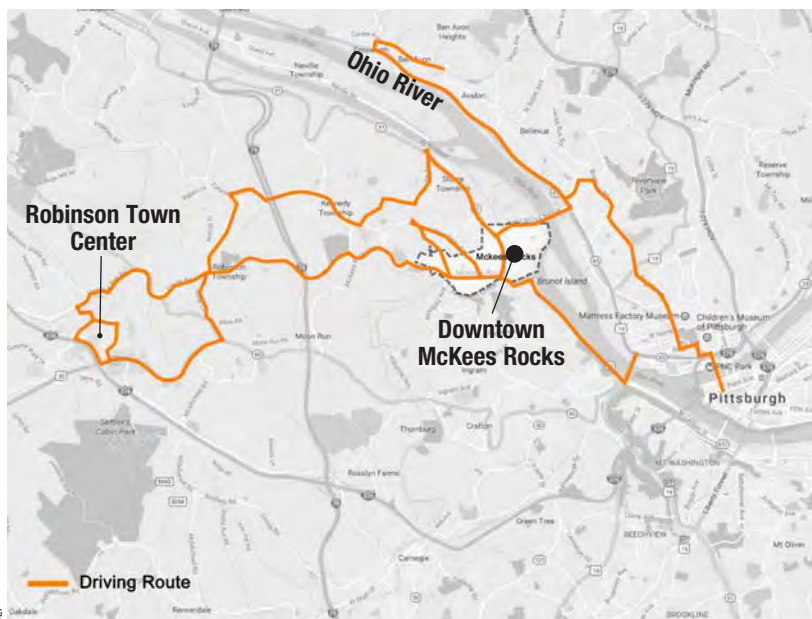
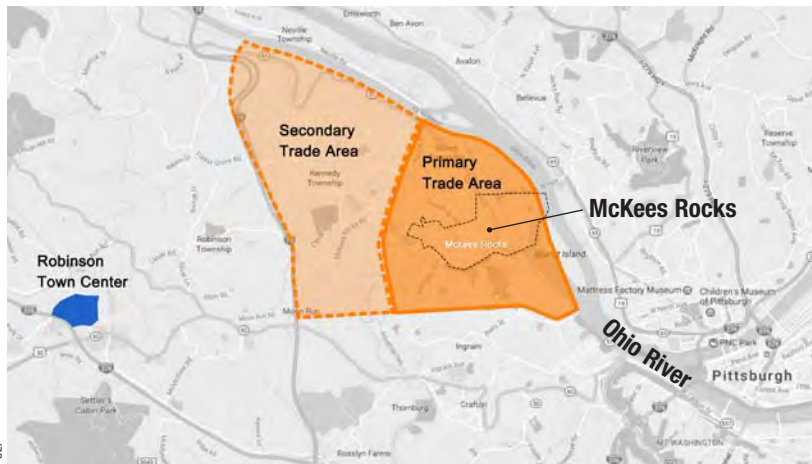
A concept use for the study area highlights the need for a focus on lower Chartiers Avenue and development emanating from this core. Eventually, the study area should include multiple uses and transportation modes.

marginalized area, it can seem expedient in the short run to disregard an integral land use plan. However, maintaining the integrity of land uses that reflect the underlying attributes of different parts of McKees Rocks will be key to unlocking the community's success. For example, industrial and warehouse uses require large expanses of flat land, whereas residential and, to a lesser degree, office structures can be built on land that is geographically more challenging for development. That said, some of the flatlands of the P&L site beside Hays Manor and around the downtown area could also incorporate a larger scale

commercial or mixed-use development area when market conditions support those uses.

McKees Rocks is poised to capture public, nonprofit, and private funds to support economic development. McKees Rocks has been identified by the Heinz Foundation as an area of growth as is evidenced by its commitment to the Roxian Theatre. Moreover, RK Mellon Foundation along with others strongly supports the Father Ryan Arts Center and Focus on Renewal. The Allegheny Conference has included McKees Rocks among the select number of target areas to which it plans to funnel money and resources. McKees Rocks could become known for its burgeoning arts and food scene with the support of the Roxian Theatre, Father Ryan Arts Center, and small businesses.

The image below represents the primary and secondary trade areas for the study. This area was determined through market research with local businesses. The bottom image shows the driving route that panelists took in determining the trade area.



Defining the Trade Area

The Pittsburgh region includes multiple neighborhoods, boroughs, and counties. Each of these communities has its unique feel and location on a map. However, economics is not so simple. Political and geographical boundaries are less important than the distance a person is willing to travel to buy a cup of coffee or a quart of milk, to fill a prescription, to get to work, or to purchase a home. The panel determined that the primary trade area encompassing the study area includes Stowe Township, the borough of McKees Rocks, and the city of Pittsburgh neighborhoods of Esplen, Sheraden, and Chartiers. The secondary trade area includes Kennedy Township. These areas were determined on the basis of a driving tour and stakeholder interviews, plus discussions with local business owners and workers.

The primary trade area has a population of 18,428, and the secondary trade area has a population of 8,243. Kennedy Township, the secondary trade area, is wealthier overall and has a higher median home value than does the Pittsburgh region as a whole. Conversely, the primary trade area is less wealthy and has a lower home value than does the Pittsburgh region, but it is denser. Interestingly, the primary trade area has a lower median age than the Pittsburgh region as a whole. That was an unexpected

Trade Area Demographics

	Primary	Secondary	Allegheny County	Pittsburgh MSA
Population	18,428	8,243	1,230,459	2,353,045
Households	8,108	3,601	529,534	–
Median age	39.4	49.5	40.5	43
Median household income	\$30,510	\$66,223	\$53,040	\$34,080
Per capita income	\$18,778	\$34,830	\$32,848	\$32,695
Highest education attainment (age 25+)				
High school or GED/alternative	43.2%	36.8%	–	–
Some college or associate's degree	27.7%	25.3%	–	–
Bachelor's degree or higher	17.0%	32.6%	37.80%	–
Median home value	\$74,969	\$159,418	\$129,600	\$133,000

Sources: Esri, ULI.

Note: MSA = metropolitan statistical area.

finding based on the interviews and other discussions the panel had throughout the week, particularly as it relates to the school district. The primary trade area has a lower education attainment rate than does the secondary trade area, with 17 percent having attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 32.6 percent.

Market Research

According to the JLL's *Construction Outlook Report* for the third quarter of 2016, the economy is potentially reaching the peak of an economic cycle. In the near term, financiers, developers, and contractors will likely focus on projects and markets with strong fundamentals. The industrial sector seems to be an exception to this rule, growing with new-to-market products in particular. More specific location market research from Moody's Analytics suggests that the Pittsburgh region is in an expansion cycle and that the largest regional drivers are the financial, medical, and energy sectors. Those sectors are helped by internationally acclaimed education and research institutions and are helping to spur growth in high-tech industries such as robotics and health care. Moreover, hospitals are shifting away from cutting costs because the market is competitive. However, the region and the study area have anemic population growth and aging infrastructure. Those factors hamper the competitiveness of the Pittsburgh region.

This section provides market research and analysis of the study area, including retail, industrial, office and health care, and residential uses. The analysis provides current economic conditions as well as some targeted recommendations to improve these market conditions. More substantial recommendations to build a stronger McKees Rocks and Esplen are included in subsequent sections.

Retail

The panel offers the following recommendations regarding retail:

- McKees Rocks CDC should support the creation of a small business association to encourage specialty retail use.
- Land use changes should be made through zoning as necessary.
- The borough of McKees Rocks and Allegheny County should offer strategic incentives to companies to encourage growth that will become a solid tax base, but the government should not give away so much that the incentives outweigh the community benefits.
- The borough of McKees Rocks should consider relocating civic buildings, such as the police headquarters and municipal building, to the commercial center.

- Signature businesses should be relocated from outlying areas of McKees Rocks or from surrounding boroughs to the McKees Rocks downtown.
- Using zoning constraints, local building codes, and requirements for special-use permits, the borough should force certain adult businesses to relocate away from gateway intersections. Such businesses need not be forced out of town; rather, the gateway intersections should be reserved for businesses that better reflect the character that McKees Rocks wants to telegraph to the larger community.
- Specialty and active retail should be encouraged along lower Chartiers Avenue and commodity retail activity should continue at the location of the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing within downtown McKees Rocks.

Before considering how McKees Rocks should handle its retail mix, one must understand the distinction between commodity retail and specialty retail. Commodity retail goods and services are those goods and services that are purchased and consumed on a regular basis from “primary” household funds, largely without emotional attachment by the consumer and at retail outlets (stores, shopping centers, online) that offer the consumer the best combination of low price and convenience at a particular moment. Examples of commodity retailers include local convenience stores, drugstores, grocery stores, discount stores, and warehouse stores. The primary purpose of a “commodity shopping center” is the aggregation of a number of commodity retailers in one location, allowing for convenient cross-shopping. The Aldi, RiteAid, and Family Dollar–anchored Chartiers Crossing center in McKees Rocks is a good example. Other examples of commodity retailers include Home Depot, OfficeMax, Best Buy, Costco, and Walmart, all of which are located at or near Robinson Town Centre in Robinson Township, west of McKees Rocks.

Specialty retail goods and services, by contrast, are those goods and services that are purchased on an optional basis by consumers using “discretionary funds” (i.e., funds not designated for basics such as rent, transportation, and



DAVID GREENSFELDER/ULI

The Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing represents commodity retail. Included are stores such as Aldi and RiteAid. Usually, commodity retail customers have little emotional connection to the shopping experience.

food) and are selected and often consumed during “free” or “discretionary” time (i.e., when not working or tending to daily responsibilities). Successful specialty shopping areas deliver a unique and attractive combination of stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues and an environment (a sense of place) that often reflects the character of consumers in the trade area in which they operate. Equally important, these specialty shopping areas lend themselves to extended consumer stays. An emotional connection to the shopping experience is an important part of the consumer’s point of reference. Successful specialty shopping venues, regardless of format, deliver a unique combination of “product” (shops) and “place” (physical and conceptual



DAVID GREENSFELDER/ULI

Hollywood Music & Sound represents specialty retail. Creating an emotional connection to the shopping experience in customers is important for specialty retail to succeed.

A Short History of Retail

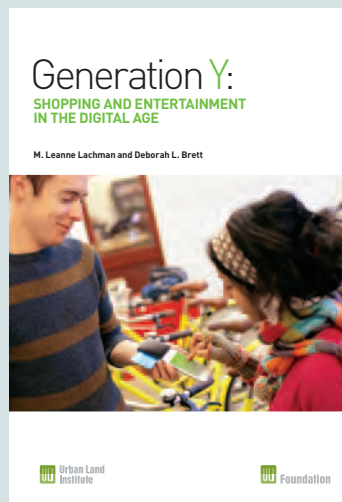
In the early 20th century, cars were a rarity. Most towns and cities had downtown districts that served as the community's commercial hub and were characterized by a massing of retail that evolved to serve the community's needs. When retail was clustered in a downtown or town square environment, there was no need for today's ubiquitous suburban shopping centers. By the 1950s, the automobile became commonplace and started a trend toward suburbanization, which, in turn, led to the birth of suburban shopping centers. Over time, in the increasingly decentralized urban landscape shopping centers replaced stores found in Main Street shopping districts. The Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing in downtown McKees Rocks is a somewhat odd amalgam of the two: its form is that of a suburban strip center, but its location is in the middle of the McKees Rocks commercial district.

Just as the advent of shopping malls began to erode the downtown shopping district's market share, the growth of mass discounters began to erode the traditional department store's market share. Shortly thereafter, Walmart and Kmart started nationwide expansions, and "category killers" such as Best Buy, PetSmart, and Office Depot became more efficient, specializing in one particular category. Projects with a variety of category killers conveniently clustered together, such as in nearby Robinson Town Centre, have come to be known as power centers. The ability of such stores to offer a wide variety of merchandise within a category then combined with supply and distribution advantages and enabled them to offer low prices every day.

With decades of retail consolidation, the colocation of category killers in power centers and the advent of the exurb (a district that lies beyond the suburbs, often inhabited by prosperous residents) resulted in fewer and fewer malls remaining truly successful and even fewer downtown shopping districts being able to survive. This trend has had an outside impact on small communities

such as McKees Rocks, Stowe Township, and others with small Main Street retail districts. At the same time that downtown shopping districts and regional malls have declined in favor of big-box, category-killer retailers, today's "commodity" versus "specialty" paradigm has evolved. At its essence, today's retail environment is about shopping for commodities where convenience and price determine buying decisions versus shopping at specialty retailers where experience informs buying decisions.

In January 2013, ULI and Lachman Associates conducted a nationally representative online survey of 1,251 gen Yers (ages 18–35) to gauge their retail, dining, and entertainment preferences. Nearly half of the survey respondents said they frequently combine a shopping trip with a meal out, and another 47 percent sometimes do so. Only 6 percent said they never eat out as part of a shopping trip. Again, these findings reinforce the view that generation Y considers the shopping experience to be entertaining, fun, and sharable. Additional information can be found in ULI's *Generation Y: Shopping and Entertainment in the Digital Age* report.



environment), unique and attractive to the consumer within the market or trade area in question. Examples of specialty retailers include local restaurants such as Pierogies Plus, entertainment venues such as the soon-to-be-remodeled Roxian Theatre, and Hollowood Music & Sound.

Understanding this distinction informs how McKees Rocks should look at its downtown, where Chartiers Avenue generally has specialty retail outlets, compared with the downtown-adjacent Chartiers Crossing center, where commodity retailers have congregated. Although daily

Active retail spills onto the street and engages customers to entice them to come into the store.



needs—serving commodity retailers are important for the community, it will be a strong collection of specialty retailers located along Chartiers Avenue that will define the community.

The McKees Rocks CDC should take a strong interest in making sure that owners of retail properties understand the importance of and are encouraged to act appropriately on this distinction. They should further ensure that owners take an active role in curating a mix of specialty uses in the buildings that the CDC directly and indirectly controls on Chartiers Avenue. Furthermore, this focus on specialty retailers may mean that more locally owned than chain businesses are sought.

Local entrepreneurs may need some additional support, and it should be a McKees Rocks CDC focus to cultivate and support local entrepreneurial endeavors. One clear benefit will be that discretionary spending will be more likely to stay within the community. Likewise, the borough should keep this distinction in mind as it updates its zon-

Jim Crivelli Chevrolet is an example of inactive retail. The dealership could be consolidated to create more active retail and other active uses while not needing to change the licensing or address of the dealership. Some vehicles could be stored off site.



ing, creating zoning districts or overlays that lay out the sorts of retail uses that are appropriate in various areas.

Another important way to think about retail is in terms of active and inactive uses. “Active uses” refer to locations where shoppers or pedestrians interact with built spaces even if they don’t go inside to buy a good or service. Examples would include specialty retailers such as local restaurants, grocery stores or drugstores, dollar stores, and even a karate studio, art gallery, or real estate agency.

By contrast, the term *inactive uses* refers to locations where the flow of a retail district is broken so that a significant gap exists between stores and so that pedestrians do not interact with the built environment. Even active uses with limited hours may become inactive uses when the facilities close and become “dark” during nonbusiness hours. Examples of such businesses include offices, medical facilities, auto repair services, and big-box stores such as Costco or Walmart that do not have outward-facing displays. Poor design can also lead unintentionally to inactive uses. The Big Lots space in Chartiers Crossing, for example, was retrofitted with a facade opaque to passersby when it became the McKees Rocks Day Health Center of LIFE Pittsburgh.

The “gravity side of the trade area” is defined as the general direction in the trade area from which residents and daytime workers enter the trade area and to which they travel to leave the area. From an operational perspective, the greatest concentration of retail goods and services in McKees Rocks lies in the area in and around State Route 51 and Chartiers Avenue, and along Island Avenue. It is no coincidence that the retail areas are in the same direction as the main ways in and out of McKees Rocks via the McKees Rocks Bridge and the Carson Street bridge.

Complete neighborhoods include a robust commercial core. Where retail is dispersed throughout a neighborhood, or where a (longer) car trip is necessary to obtain daily needs items (such food, consumables, and medicine), residents, neighborhood character, and the environment are all disadvantaged. By adopting a retail consolidation strategy, the borough of McKees Rocks could aim to strengthen the

overall community by encouraging retail to locate in the most robust and defensible nodes and to let other areas evolve to other uses as market forces dictate.

Active uses, well-articulated buildings, and a varied streetscape that incorporates features such as parks or parklets with commercial uses are all strategies for having lively streets. As a rule, inactive uses can be incorporated with active ones so long as they do not create excessive voids that break the flow as one travels down a street. Mixed-use projects can help promote vitality and even define a neighborhood. However, they should be undertaken with caution because integrating different uses into the same project is complicated and can result in space that does not function well for any of the intended users. For example, the Allegheny County Housing Authority has been discussed as a candidate for a mixed-use project on the Eat'n Park site. Inserting an office use can be beneficial to a downtown commercial district, but it must be done in a way that would reinforce the pedestrian experience rather than interrupt it, by avoiding ground-floor offices in favor of more active uses on the street. Because ground-floor retail complicates the management of office properties, owners—particularly public agencies—tend to shy away from including such uses.

Additional recommendations to spur retail growth include the following:

- Create temporary pop-ups in vacant lots. Shipping containers could be used and would emphasize ties to growth of the CSX intermodal station.
- Encourage other small businesses that arise organically. Incentives and coordination will be required with the use of public, private, and nonprofit funds.
- Understand that although the CSX facility will accommodate more than 300 trucks per day, those trucks will be within McKees Rocks for a limited time and should not be considered a target for capturing retail customers. Retail opportunities will probably be limited to refueling and convenience store purchases, which would be better accommodated in the corridor from McKees Rocks

Bridge to the CSX facility, rather than in the commercial core.

- Expand civic uses within the main retail corridor.
 - Relocate the municipal center to the main commercial center for prominence and a source of community pride.
 - Offer community college or university programs.
- Model development after the Father Ryan Arts Center. The multiple uses within the building are well patronized and create activity. Focus On Renewal (F.O.R.) Sto-Rox Neighborhood Corporation's library is among the programs being located in the facility.

Industrial

The panel offers the following recommendations regarding industrial uses in the study area:

- McKees Rocks CDC should initiate the creation of an SBA and encourage CSX and other industrial owners to become involved (even though such industrial firms may not typically be involved in larger community organizations).
- The borough and county should offer strategic incentives to encourage growth that will become a solid tax base but not give away too much. The government also should be an advocate for identifying incentives outside typical regional agencies, such as through the EB-5 program for financing by foreign investors.
- Focus industrial recruitment on “boutique” uses that are related to flex/R&D and small manufacturers. Flat land is a finite resource within McKees Rocks and Esplen and should be viewed as such. Larger footprint users, including warehouse/logistics and heavy industrial users, should be located closer to the CSX facility and should transition to lighter uses and mixed-use closer to downtown McKees Rocks and the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing.
- The borough of McKees Rocks will need to thoughtfully consider the infrastructure needs of the community as

it copes with increased traffic. The borough needs to press its high-impact users to assist in funding and offsetting the cost of installation and maintenance required to address the traffic issue. Also, initiatives to increase the efficiency of use may include adding ordinances and signage for routing big rigs (to avoid lower Chartiers Avenue) and conducting assessments of roads and bridges that will experience higher use.

As previously stated, industrial and related warehousing and logistics uses require large expanses of flat areas. In addition, they require an easy connection to roadway networks and access to rail, inland waterways, and municipal utilities.

These are assets that McKees Rocks possesses within the former P&LE site now owned by Trinity Development.

Industry is generally defined as general manufacturing, processing, assembling, handling, and storing of products and materials. Industrial activity can be classified into light, general, heavy, and special uses depending on scale, noise, effluents, odors, appearance, nature of materials, and so on, and separate zoning areas may be designated for different use intensities. A light-industrial zone would be intended for low-intensity industrial uses, nonintensive manufacturing, and processing of nonhazardous materials. By contrast, heavy industrial zones would typically use larger land areas for activities that include heavy process-

Focus on Small Urban Manufacturers

Market fundamentals for industrial uses are strong within the study area. Thus, a concerted effort should be made to encourage the right type of industrial development. Stakeholder interviews and discussions have convinced the panel that the focus of recruitment for industrial activities should be on “boutique uses”: those uses that occupy less space and can be integrated into a walkable urban environment, including a brewery, coffee roaster, or furniture designer. These uses will ultimately employ more workers than other types of modern industrial development, which is increasingly mechanized and computerized. Today, a majority (70 percent) of the manufacturing companies within the United States employ fewer than 20 workers. The future of manufacturing in the United States is going to be on high-value, high-tech manufacturing that depends more on automation. Although the numbers may be smaller than in the past, opportunities to grow high-quality industrial jobs are out there.

To grow small urban manufacturers or “boutique uses,” the borough of McKees Rocks should conduct an analysis of existing manufacturers and create a network for these companies and for skilled laborers who may want to start a business. Such a network will help connect small urban manufacturers to community colleges, universities, and national laboratories as well as connect to sources of capital—both private and public. In addition, the development of coworking locations or spaces that enable the sharing of expensive equipment should be developed. The space could include items such as equipment for

woodworking, metalworking, laser-cutting, 3-D printing, and potentially sewing equipment. The McKees Rocks CDC and the South West Pittsburgh CDC could support the development of microloans for emerging companies. McKees Rocks should not spend all its time chasing large manufacturers seeking to relocate to industrially zoned properties. Instead, the community should grow a strong and robust manufacturing base that is locally owned and operated.

Additional ideas on how to support growing small urban manufacturers can be obtained through the Urban Manufacturing Alliance, urbanmfg.org, or the American Small Manufacturer’s Coalition, smallmanufacturers.org.



A vacant industrial building on the P&LE site owned by Trinity Development. This building could be repurposed to house boutique industrial uses, including coworking and “maker” spaces.

Industrial Submarket for Pittsburgh Region

		Inventory (square feet)	YTD absorption	YTD absorption (percentage of stock)	Total availability (square feet)	Total availability (%)	Average asking rent (US\$ price per square foot)	YTD completions	Under construction
Market totals	Warehouse and distribution	82,851,096	2,127,012	2.6%	9,172,756	11.1%	\$5.19	1,442,000	137,500
	Manufacturing	55,820,524	1,082,617	1.9%	4,159,578	7.5%	\$3.76	56,000	0
	Total	138,671,620	3,209,629	2.3%	1,332,334	9.6%	\$4.74	1,498,000	137,500
	Flex/R&D	20,818,654	499,006	2.4%	2,706,800	13.0%	\$9.90	122,000	0
Beaver County	Warehouse and distribution	4,495,997	379,805	8.4%	604,543	13.4%	\$5.39	0	0
	Manufacturing	4,517,893	38,000	0.8%	157,200	3.5%	\$2.65	0	0
	Total	9,013,890	417,805	4.6%	761,743	8.5%	\$4.82	0	0
	Flex/R&D	579,085	26,475	4.6%	90,860	15.7%	\$10	0	0
Downtown	Warehouse and distribution	18,147,571	58,509	0.3%	1,346,986	7.4%	\$5.61	0	0
	Manufacturing	4,823,443	268,796	5.6%	114,877	2.4%	\$7.15	0	0
	Total	22,971,014	327,305	1.4%	1,461,863	6.4%	\$5.73	0	0
	Flex/R&D	3,048,264	27,109	0.9%	409,202	13.4%	\$8	0	0
West	Warehouse and distribution	10,561,216	778,297	7.4%	1,072,964	10.2%	\$6.42	80,000	100,000
	Manufacturing	2,749,553	4,172	0.2%	159,916	5.8%	\$5.00	0	0
	Total	13,310,769	782,469	5.9%	1,232,880	9.3%	\$6.24	80,000	100,000
	Flex/R&D	3,257,885	145,062	4.5%	443,991	13.6%	12.59	122,000	0

Sources: JLL, ULI.

Note: Data are for the fourth quarter of 2016. YTD = year to date.

ing of industrial goods and manufacturing and processing that involves hazardous materials. Either could take advantage of direct railway siding or sharing a marshalling yard facility for block train maneuvers.

According to JLL's *Construction Outlook Report* for the third quarter of 2016, the growth rate of industrial new project completions nationally has increased, with vacancy rates of 5.8 percent, the lowest rate in over 16 years. Despite job losses in the manufacturing and the energy sectors, demand is increasing for industrial space. In addition, uncertainty surrounds the potential for the United States to reopen negotiations for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). A reduction in global trade may have direct impacts on McKees Rocks, especially because of the increased connection to the global trade network through the CSX facility.

Within the McKees Rocks submarket, total industrial vacancy is at 9.3 percent. This is slightly lower than the regional vacancy total of 9.6 percent. Vacancy in the Pittsburgh region for industrial uses is deceptive because many older and outdated buildings drive up the vacancy rate. Newer and remodeled space, including speculative projects, is quickly absorbed. Flex/R&D space has the highest average rental asking price per square foot of \$12.59, followed by warehouse and distribution at \$6.42, and manufacturing at \$5.00.

Taking advantage of the significant amount of flat area in McKees Rocks, CSX's intermodal facility will likely open late in 2017. The best uses for land around CSX's intermodal facility will take advantage of the flat topography, easy connection to roadway networks, municipal utilities, and perhaps access to inland waterways. In addition to the

sorts of industrial activities already described, these uses might include warehousing and logistics, open storage, draying of products, processing, packaging, assembling of components or goods, light truck and freight terminals and warehouses, materials yards, automobile sales and service facilities, and ancillary uses such as offices serving a primary activity, truck parking, and offices and services for trucks and truckers ideally located near the McKees Rocks Bridge. Additional uses that might be considered include design-build firms, shipping container conversion for other uses, and future uses related to the planned Shell ethane cracker facility being built upstream in Beaver County, plus the potential PTT Global Chemical ethane cracker facility under consideration in nearby Belmont County, Ohio.

Warehouse and distribution uses will be the easiest businesses to attract, but for the McKees Rocks community, ultimately those operations are not optimal because they will employ very few residents in return for consuming a disproportionate percentage of the community's available land. Instead, consistent with the goals of the McKees

Rocks CDC and various stakeholders interviewed by the panel, flex/R&D and light manufacturing would be the best industrial uses to pursue. Many heavier industrial uses, including logistics operations, should be built closer to the CSX facility in the northern portion of the P&LE site. Then uses should transition to more flex/R&D and other mixed uses closer to Chartiers Creek and lower Chartiers Avenue.

Office and Health Care

The panel offers the following recommendations regarding office and health care facilities:

- McKees Rocks CDC should support the creation of an SBA that would encourage diverse office use (research and development and other education and medical uses overlap with these).
- Land use changes should be made through zoning as necessary.
- The borough of McKees Rocks and Allegheny County should offer strategic incentives to companies to

Rethinking Logistics: Strong “Last-Mile” Demand to Spur Development

The “last mile” or the final leg of deliveries is the most inefficient and represents about 28 percent of the total cost to move goods. The CSX facility presents an opportunity to grow businesses focused on this type of delivery that can create jobs and economic development opportunities. In Chicago’s North Lawndale neighborhood, Clarius Partners

has proposed a new development that would include 320,000 square feet of industrial buildings and 61,000 square feet of retail space. The project is being built in three phases. First, two 176,000-square-foot industrial buildings will be built on speculation. The second phase will include a built-to-suit 144,000-square-foot building. In the third phase, three retail buildings will be erected along Roosevelt Road. The development is designed to employ an estimated 380 people with multiple tenants that range from manufacturers to shipping firms. The project is targeting food suppliers and delivery companies such as FedEx and DHL that require same-day services and need to be near their customers.



North Lawndale is one of Chicago’s poorest neighborhoods, with a median income of \$23,183 and an unemployment rate of 25 percent. Sears was headquartered in the neighborhood before it moved to the Sears Tower, now Willis Tower.

JUGGERNAUT/CORBIS

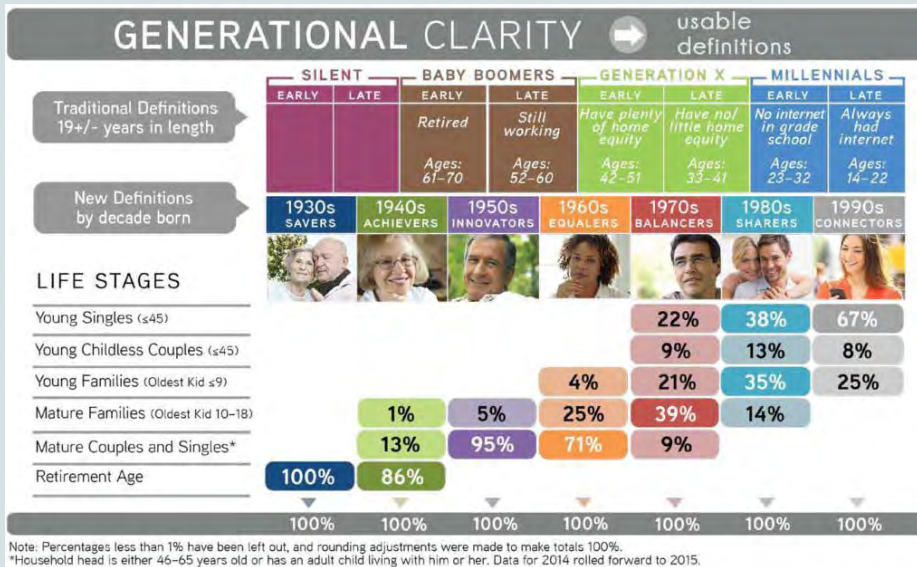
Clarius Partners is also building additional speculative flex space within Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood for those industrial uses that are being displaced by the growth of technology and other firms expanding and relocating to former industrial areas. McKees Rocks could attract urban manufacturers displaced by growth in East Liberty and Oakland.

Demographics Affect Office Use

Office tenancy has changed along with demographic trends. Specifically, the following should be noted:

- Sharers, the generation born during the 1980s who are currently 26 to 37 years old, will soon move into senior management roles.
- Most sharers have formed their households, but they have delayed marriage and childbirth more than any generation before them.
- Although it appears that this generation cohort is less interested in suburban living than previous generations, the coming transition to family mode may induce many of them to move to the suburbs, a trend that is contrary to what has been occurring during the past decade.
- Expect fewer square feet per employee as more companies transition to a hotel-like atmosphere in which people “rent” a desk for the day.

These are office trends that should be monitored as downtown McKees Rocks revitalizes.



ULI's Terwilliger Center for Housing partnered with the Residential Neighborhood Development Council to develop the Demographic Strategies for Real Estate report to provide perspective on the occurrence of key demographic shifts and the impact of the shifts on urban development.

encourage growth that will become a solid tax base, but the government should not give away so much that the incentives outweigh the community benefits.

- The McKees Rocks CDC should identify likely office users for the study area. Examples might be include construction and design-build firms and firms that relate to the sorts of service businesses that colocate with intermodal facilities such as that being developed by CSX.

Attributes for successful urban office development include higher density, more walkability, and less auto dependency than for typical suburban locations. Conversely, suburban office environments tend to emphasize convenience and ease of use (proximity to traffic corridors, easy access, convenient and cheap parking), easy proximity to nearby business centers, and lower development costs.

More Class A office space was completed within Pittsburgh's Urban submarket (442,000 square feet) than the Suburban submarket (408,000 square feet) during the

Office Submarket for Pittsburgh Region

	Class	Inventory (square feet)	Total net absorption (square feet)	YTD total net absorption (square feet)	YTD absorption (%)	Direct vacancy (%)	Total vacancy (%)	Average direct asking rent (US\$ price per square foot)	YTD completions	Under construction
CBD	A	13,102,880	-233,069	-265,150	-2.0	9.8	11.9	28.94	128,000	0
	B	5,825,255	82,480	331,786	5.7	17.6	18.6	21.97	0	0
	Total	18,928,135	66,636	66,636	0.4	12.2	14.0	25.95	128,000	0
Fringe	A	1,905,907	169,117	294,205	15.4	4.7	5.6	24.12	105,000	105,000
	B	5,620,688	-75,989	-112,127	-2.0	15.6	16.2	22.90	0	0
	Total	7,526,595	93,128	182,078	2.4	12.9	13.5	23.02	105,000	105,000
Oakland/ East End	A	969,243	-751	213,198	22.0	13.7	14.0	36.23	209,000	0
	B	1,024,113	-237	5,763	0.6	3.0	3.0	21.41	0	0
	Total	1,993,356	-1,078	218,961	11.0	8.2	8.4	33.46	209,000	0
Urban	A	15,978,030	-64,703	242,253	1.5	9.4	11.3	29.23	442,000	105,000
	B	12,470,056	6,164	225,422	1.8	15.5	16.2	22.40	0	0
	Total	28,448,086	-58,539	467,675	1.6	12.1	13.5	25.43	442,000	105,000
West	A	3,767,504	-10,675	-15,207	-0.4	17.3	19.6	22.61	90,000	0
	B	3,144,922	-19,325	41,133	1.3	24.4	24.4	19.51	0	44,000
	Total	6,912,426	-30,000	25,926	0.4	20.5	21.8	20.91	90,000	44,000
Suburban	A	10,580,638	-46,240	-129,762	-1.2	16.9	19.7	23.33	408,000	218,000
	B	11,326,804	-223,838	-293,938	-2.6	20.3	21.4	19.86	0	74,000
	Total	21,907,442	-270,078	-423,700	-1.9	18.7	20.6	21.29	408,000	292,000
Total	A	26,558,668	-110,943	112,491	0.4	12.4	14.7	25.93	850,000	323,000
	B	23,796,860	-217,674	-68,516	-0.3	17.8	18.7	20.91	0	74,000
	Total	50,355,528	-328,617	43,975	0.1	15.0	16.6	23.05	850,000	397,000

Sources: JLL, ULI.

Note: Data are for the fourth quarter of 2016. CBD = central business district; YTD = year to date.

fourth quarter of 2016. This Class A office growth is occurring predominantly within the Oakland/East End neighborhoods. Some office development is occurring within the West submarket, which includes McKees Rocks. Average asking gross rent for Class A in the West submarket is \$20.91 per square foot, whereas within the Oakland/East End it is \$33.46 and downtown it is \$25.95. Class B office space is being absorbed within downtown (5.7 percent year-to-date), South (1.5 percent year-to-date), West (1.3 percent year-to-date), and slightly in Oakland/East End (0.6 percent year-to-date). Some Class B office space is being constructed within the West submarket, and the average asking rent is \$19.51 per square foot, which is cheaper than downtown at \$21.97. These rents are too

low for most new construction to be justified by the private sector without public sector incentives.

Office uses to be considered within McKees Rocks and Esplan include the following:

- The county housing authority indicated its interest in placing its headquarters in McKees Rocks, an immediate tangible development that would reflect the growth of McKees Rocks in the region and add pedestrian impact. The new headquarters could be paired with affordable housing units, first-floor retail or community space, or other speculative light industrial uses, or a combination of those.

- Ohio Valley General Hospital, “Doc in a Box” retail clinics, and other medical and pharmaceutical facilities could be developed in response to aging demographics.
- Area universities are working to find office space for emerging research and development programs in the Pittsburgh area. The panel encourages the various stakeholders in the area (McKees Rocks CDC, the borough, Allegheny County, South West Pittsburgh CDC, and the city of Pittsburgh) to promote McKees Rocks and Esplen for the top of this list because of the rising rents in Oakland and the East End submarket.
- In addition, educational partnerships with tech schools or the Community College of Allegheny County could identify a need for additional space as they respond to the region’s employment gap, currently estimated at 30,000 and projected to grow, especially in the areas of advanced manufacturing and health care.
- Other potential services that might locate office space in McKees Rocks or Esplen could include engineering and construction management firms.

Offices should be located either in or near downtown McKees Rocks or along West Carson Street in Esplen. Increased office use in those locations would help support the addition of retail activity along lower Chartiers Avenue. In the longer term, when the market supports market-rate development, a mix of office, retail, and residential uses could locate at the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing site. In the meantime, any public sector office development should occur near the Linden and Chartiers Avenue intersection that fits within the urban character of downtown McKees Rocks.

Residential

The panel offered the following recommendations for improving residential opportunities:

- The McKees Rocks CDC should create housing programs to support homeownership.
- Make land use changes per zoning as necessary. Specifically, zoning should allow for mixed-use development

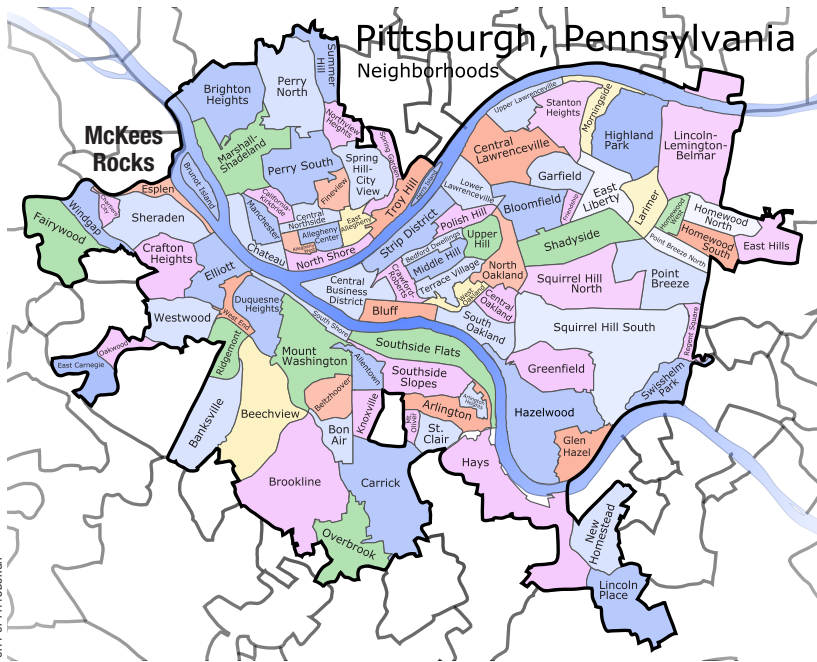


Penrose Square on Columbia Pike in Arlington County, Virginia, was formerly the Adams Square Shopping Center. The project includes 299 residential apartments, a 61,500-square-foot grocery store, 36,000 square feet of additional retail space, and 713 parking spaces. Arlington County paid for 122 parking spaces to be reserved for public parking. A redevelopment like this project should be a longer-term goal, potentially for when leases begin to expire at the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing and demand for new rental construction increases.

and should provide for implementing plans, such as cutting a street through the Chartiers Crossing block to reconnect the street grid and integrate the property with downtown.

- The borough of McKees Rocks and Allegheny County should offer strategic incentives to companies to encourage growth that will become a solid tax base, but the government should not give away so much that the incentives outweigh the community benefits.
- Any redevelopment of the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing that includes housing should be made in partnership with residential developers (housing authority or others to create a project like the Penrose Square Apartments in Arlington County, Virginia).
- The McKees Rocks CDC should provide market support for single-family-home construction, renovation, and ownership.

As neighborhoods redevelop closer to the city of Pittsburgh, as well as neighborhoods such as East Liberty, Oakland, Duquesne Heights, and Lawrenceville, development will eventually push closer to the study area. This process will take a long time. Broadly speaking, national



More than 80 neighborhoods are located within the city of Pittsburgh—plus many more communities are within Allegheny County—and not all of them are redeveloping. Strengthening lower Charters Avenue into a destination with completion of the Roxian Theatre and specialty retail space will help attract new residents to McKees Rocks and Esplen.

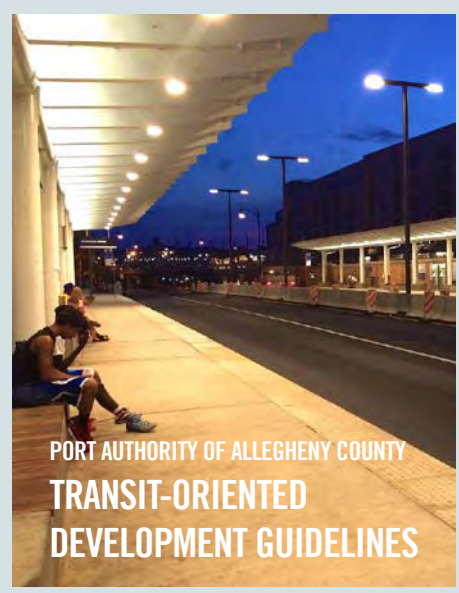
housing rental rates will surge over the long term. It is expected that 7.3 million of the 12.5 million net new households created over the next decade will rent. This forecast results from several factors, including the difficulty of obtaining mortgages, the sharing economy, student debt, and a slow recovery from the Great Recession.

The market is expanding, and increasing retirement rates will create increased competition for good workers. Thus, wages will increase and will allow for higher rents. It is expected that fixed 30-year mortgage rates will no longer stay low and will rise to 6 percent by 2025, hurting affordability and homeownership. As a result, it is urgent to move quickly to strengthen homeownership within McKees Rocks and Esplen. Home prices and rents will increase slightly faster than incomes each year (mortgage payments grow faster as interest rates rise). Increased local regulation and supply constraints around the country will continue to limit supply, applying upward pressure on prices and rents, particularly along the coasts but also in communities like the Pittsburgh region that are catching up to national trends. Housing affordability will continue to get worse.

Transit-Oriented Development

Large mixed-use development is occurring throughout the Pittsburgh region. One of the drivers of this development is a lack of new rental units and transit-oriented development or TOD. The Port of Allegheny County created excellent guidelines in April 2016 that suggest that TOD will occur within the Pittsburgh region within a half mile of either a light rail or bus rapid transit station. Although bus stops are good for transportation access and mobility, they generally do not drive real estate development. The Sheraden Station along the West Busway is the nearest opportunity for TOD, about a mile and a half from the study area. A new station could be proposed at West Carson Street and the West Busway, but this also is about a mile and a half away from the study area. Another new busway could be proposed, one that runs through downtown McKees Rocks and includes a station. There are ongoing discussions of using water taxis for commuting purposes, but any pilot efforts would likely focus along the Allegheny River.

More information about the TOD guidelines can be found at www.portauthority.org.



PORT AUTHORITY OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY
**TRANSIT-ORIENTED
 DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

The Port Authority of Allegheny County established guidelines for successful implementation of transit-oriented development within the Pittsburgh region.



The Holiday Neighborhood in Boulder, Colorado, transformed a former grayfield site into a low-rise, mixed-use residential community. The development includes a range of housing types, including single-family detached houses, townhouses, lofts, duplexes, triplexes, and apartments. The project includes small-scale buildings with retail space on the first floor and residential or office space on the second and third floors. To encourage transit use, residents pay for an unlimited pass on regional transit services through their annual homeowner association dues.

According to the September 2016 Moody's Analytics report for the Pittsburgh region, single-family construction has been slow to respond to growing demand, meaning that there is an expectation for building to pick up over the next few years. Some demand for single-family or semiattached townhouses within McKees Rocks and Esplen already exists. In addition, as the nation's aging population increases, demand for senior-living apartments will increase.

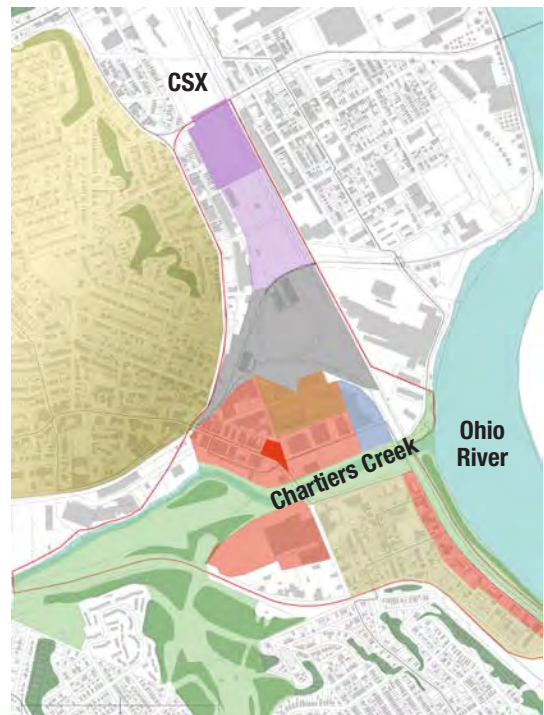
Economic development will be a factor in driving market-rate housing in McKees Rocks. For instance, a successful arts and food scene and a walkable retail core will appeal to renters and homeowners who can afford to make housing choices. The growth of residential, office, and retail uses will be an iterative process and will require attention and likely course correction from the McKees Rocks CDC and other stakeholders to encourage the right balance of uses. Also important is the ability to walk to work. For this reason, the panel suggests that employers or the McKees Rocks CDC and the South West Pittsburgh CDC initiate a homeownership program that could provide downpayments or other financial assistance to encourage owner-occupied dwellings. This will improve perceptions

and increase demand for housing within McKees Rocks and Esplen.

Land Use to Create Economic Development

The study area is well connected with good proximity to downtown Pittsburgh. Trips to and from the center typically are feasible by bus transit as well as by car; internal trips are feasible by walking or bicycling. Metered street parking and parking structures accommodate private vehicles, but parking should not be a driver in the development of office space.

McKees Rocks should encourage density within downtown McKees Rocks, lower Chartiers Avenue, and, in the longer



Any new zoning should reflect compatible uses for the site. Lower Chartiers Avenue should include specialty retail, commodity retail, and a mix of residential and office space. Heavier industrial uses should be closer to the CSX intermodal facility with lighter industrial and office and commercial uses next to the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing and the Hays Manor site. The former P&E maintenance yard and facilities could serve as a transition site (in gray). Esplen should remain mostly residential, with some small offices or light-industrial uses along Highway 51 and Carson Street.

term, in and around the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing. By creating greater density, McKees Rocks will benefit from a combination of workers, residents, visitors, and shoppers that enlivens the center during the day and evening. High-density residential development is especially important to provide workforce housing and the purchasing power to support retail and personal services. However, as mentioned within the residential subsection, it may be many years until McKees Rocks can support market-rate residential development without incentives. Dense nonmarket residential, such as senior affordable housing, could be built in the near term.

Increasing amenities such as open space and nearby retail space will help make McKees Rocks and Esplan a destination. Adding amenities will create a center as an employment node with unique public venues that are popular places to socialize and conduct business, what is known as a vibrant center. Additional development is a positive feature, because greater density usually increases vibrancy. Not every suburban vibrant center meets every criterion for one. Vibrant centers can be found in all parts of metro areas, from the center to the periphery. A viable central business district typically is a region's largest and often its strongest vibrant center. Many vibrant centers are connected by public transit (rail or bus), but others can be reached only by car.

Depending on the use of the former P&LE site, an environmental assessment and remediation will likely be required. The goal of remediation is to ensure that land is cleaned up with consistent zoning and risk of exposure depending on the intended use of the property. For example, residential sites must be cleaned up to more conservative standards than commercial, which in turn increases the difficulty and cost. Although assessment and remediation can be a long-term and potentially expensive process, they can create opportunities such as addressing community concerns about environmental health of a site, providing important details to inform planning, building trust as decisions are made, and training and employing local community members in the cleanup process through brownfield job-training programs.

Population and People

McKEES ROCKS HAS LONG SUFFERED from a negative perception in the region. Over the past three decades, this perception has been further hardened as poverty and drugs have taken a stronger hold. Along with Greater Pittsburgh, McKees Rocks has experienced a severe decline in population. A concurrent decline in residential income has occurred.

This decline in population and income levels has resulted in negative impacts to McKees Rocks in the form of

- Excess housing stock,
- Declining tax base,
- Diminished school district resources,
- Deteriorating infrastructure,

- Vacant storefronts, and
- Greatly reduced retail options.

Although an active core cohort of long-term residents remains, a significant portion of the population is very transient and lower income. As many as 30 percent of students who start the school year in Sto-Rox exit the district before the end of the year.

Four public housing projects stand within the relatively small area of the Sto-Rox school district. The high number of public housing projects in McKees Rocks lends to the negative perceptions of the area and the school district, whether deserved or not. The residents of these projects similarly exhibit relatively high turnover, many never making

Regional Population Trends

Year	Pittsburgh MSA	Allegheny County	Pittsburgh city	McKees Rocks borough
1900	1,303,771	775,058	321,616	6,352
1910	1,779,718	1,018,463	533,905	14,702
1920	2,100,931	1,185,808	588,343	16,713
1930	2,381,589	1,374,410	669,817	18,116
1940	2,452,232	1,411,539	671,659	17,021
1950	2,581,297	1,515,237	676,806	16,241
1960	2,768,938	1,628,587	604,332	13,185
1970	2,759,443	1,605,016	520,117	11,901
1980	2,651,991	1,450,085	423,938	8,742
1990	2,468,289	1,336,449	369,879	7,857
2000	2,431,087	1,281,666	334,563	6,654
2010	2,356,285	1,223,348	305,704	6,104
2015	—	1,230,459	304,391	6,010

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, ULI.

Note: MSA = metropolitan statistical area.

a long-term connection to the area and leaving McKees Rocks within two to four years.

A significant share of the social services delivered within McKees Rocks are provided by Focus On Renewal (F.O.R.) and other faith-based organizations. The local political establishment has in the past looked negatively on the provision of these services as attracting less desirable and less productive residents. However, the F.O.R. and others have proved to be a reliable and effective source of support in the form of hunger programs, workforce development, and other social services that have an overall positive impact on the residents they serve, and by extension the broader community.

Given the challenges that face the area, it is clear to the panel that stabilization of the McKees Rocks and Esplen population should be a priority and principal goal of the McKees Rocks CDC, the South West Pittsburgh CDC, and the borough of McKees Rocks. Owner-occupied

homeownership is a principal and critical component to stabilizing the community and improving the quality of life for all residents.

Housing

The housing stock in McKees Rocks is very old, with a median age of well over 60 years. Many homes are 100 or more years old. These homes typically lack modern amenities. A significant portion of the housing stock is either vacant or dilapidated.

Many streets within McKees Rocks exhibit a mix of still-maintained dwellings alongside vacant or dilapidated homes. However, the unabated decline in home values exacerbates the problem as more residents abandon their homes in the fear that they could quickly become underwater. In addition, a high number of housing units in McKees Rocks are currently tax delinquent.

Roxian Theatre

The McKees Rocks CDC's major investment is the Roxian Theatre. The theater, as well as recent private investments in businesses such as Hollowood Music & Sound and Rocks Landing Bar and Grille, speak to the potential for Chartiers Avenue. Although the panel is confident that the theater will open eventually, and that it will be a catalytic investment that propels future infill development, the multiple delays and financing gaps related to the theater give the panel pause. Thus, the panel urges the McKees Rocks CDC to narrow its focus and thereby deepen its impact. The ambition of the McKees Rocks CDC and its leaders is laudable, but when ambition collides with limited resources, things fail to get done, and lack of success can erode confidence and credibility.

That being said, once the Roxian opens, additional venues for food and drink will be necessary to truly draw concertgoers from throughout the Pittsburgh region. Existing, notable restaurants and bars from throughout the greater McKees Rocks region may take the opportunity to open additional locations, relocate existing operations, or do pop-up installations or food truck operations. The McKees Rocks CDC should examine these opportunities

now, in advance of the Roxian opening. In addition, a joint marketing effort by the McKees Rocks CDC, Roxian, and these new and existing establishments would leverage each other's audiences and networks. So that the McKees Rocks CDC can maintain its focus on business development and homeownership, this marketing may be best done by some other entity, including the new SBA recommended earlier in this report.



The Roxian Theatre (left), located along lower Chartiers Avenue. Completion of the theater must be a priority; it is critical to revitalizing downtown McKees Rocks.



Vacant land and houses that are in disrepair like this one in Esplen are located throughout the study area and surrounding areas.

A high number of Section 8 housing units are located within McKees Rocks. Although such housing tends to lend to the negative perceptions of the area, the panel advises that that view is inaccurate. The use of the Section 8 housing program better maintains the condition and appearance of the housing stock. Because they are subject to federal requirements and inspection to participate in the program, owners are held to a higher level of maintenance than private sector rentals are. A much more significant impediment to neighborhood improvement in McKees Rocks and Esplen is largely unregulated rental housing units that are operated by absentee landlords who do not adhere to minimum property standards. The borough of McKees Rocks and the city of Pittsburgh should increase their enforcement of code violations and their performance of other property inspections to ensure that private sector rentals and public sector rentals are held to an equal standard.

Despite the age of the housing stock in McKees Rocks, a large number of properties are both available and structurally sound. Although they may have unassuming exteriors, the interiors of these homes can be quite attractive, often featuring hardwood floors and period details. Many properties are vacant because the mortgages are underwater. If those properties are not allowed to sit empty for too long and if the bureaucratic hurdles were minimized and a clear path to acquisition established and communicated,

they could become viable candidates for acquisition and renovation.

Homeownership

The panel has identified increasing the number of owner-occupied homes in McKees Rocks as a priority and a principal means of stabilizing the community and at the same time growing the tax base.

The development of new market-rate housing in McKees Rocks is hampered by the low home values in the area. The cost to develop a new home (about \$125,000) is significantly higher than the highest current home sale prices (about \$50,000). Until home values are adequately raised, new home development will be possible only with subsidies.

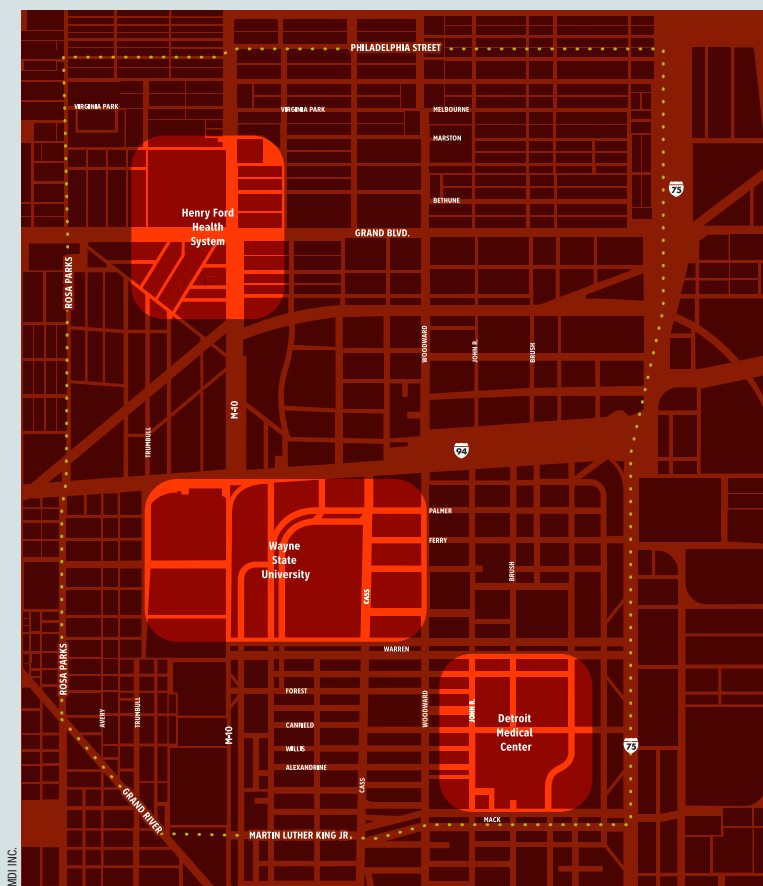
Although a significant number of homes to be acquired and redeveloped are available in McKees Rocks, impediments to progress exist. In many cases, the title to the homes is in question, making financing of the buildings untenable. In other cases, homes may have delinquent tax bills attached to them, making them unattractive as redevelopment opportunities. In addition, many houses are upside down financially, whether it's due to tax liens, debt, physical deterioration or some combination. Often this comes to a head when elderly owner occupants die and the estate members find it more attractive to simply abandon the house rather than deal with it.

Multiple populations and avenues could increase homeownership in McKees Rocks. The borough of McKees Rocks, McKees Rocks CDC, and the South West Pittsburgh CDC need to redouble their efforts to develop programs that identify and market to eligible applicants structurally sound vacant homes that may be candidates for redevelopment. The Vacant Property Working Group (VPWG), a service of the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group (PCRG), could be a source for technical assistance to cities within Allegheny County. The Allegheny County Redevelopment Authority administers the Vacant Property Recovery Program. McKees Rocks and Esplen are designated as an area eligible to participate in the low-income area program.

Stabilizing Midtown in Detroit

Detroit, Michigan, had a peak population of over 1.8 million residents in the 1950s. By July 1, 2015, the city's population was just under 700,000 (677,116). That nearly 70 percent decrease in population has had major ramifications in the quality of neighborhoods and in the perception of the city. This negative perception has hampered the ability of anchor institutions in the Midtown neighborhood of the Detroit Medical Center, the Henry Ford Health System, and Wayne State University to attract and retain a strong workforce. To counter that perception and spur investment in Midtown,

The "Live Midtown" program's boundaries in Detroit, Michigan.



the "Live Midtown" program was created by the Henry Ford Health System.

The Live Midtown program provides the following to employees:

- New homeowners relocating to the district obtain a one-to-one matching forgivable loan up to \$20,000 toward the purchase of their primary residence.
- New renters obtain a \$2,500 allowance toward the cost of their apartment in the first year followed by an additional allowance of \$1,000 for the second year.
- Existing renters within the district become eligible for an allowance of \$1,000 over one year when an existing lease is renewed or when they relocate within the district.
- Existing homeowners in the district obtain a matching allowance of up to \$5,000 for exterior improvements for projects of \$10,000 or more.

The Midtown Detroit Inc. (MDI) organization administers the Live Midtown program as well as the "Live Downtown" and "Buy Detroit" programs. More than 1,400 employees of the Detroit Medical Center, the Henry Ford Health System, and Wayne State University have been approved for the residential incentive program. Many of these employees would have located to other communities within the metropolitan Detroit area instead of choosing to live within Midtown. Since 2000, the Midtown neighborhood has seen more than \$1.8 billion in investment. Live Midtown can take some credit for the rebirth of the Midtown neighborhood along with other MDI programs focused on neighborhood stabilization and revitalization. This model could be used to attract and retain employees of companies like the Ohio Valley Hospital or Ruthrauff Sauer and help spur investment into downtown McKees Rocks.

More information can be found at www.livemidtown.org.

The McKees Rocks CDC and the South West Pittsburgh CDC should work with the Allegheny County Housing Authority to develop a program to educate and guide public housing residents on the process and prerequisites of owning a home and obtaining a home mortgage. Such pro-

grams could be developed in conjunction with CDC funders such as Dollar Bank that are willing to write mortgages on lower-priced properties for buyers with qualifying incomes. The panel believes that a combination of current residents and, more significantly, an influx of new residents will

have to occur to make this work. Any incentives will have to be attractive enough to get the attention of potential homeowners from outside the study area who are willing to be pioneers.

The McKees Rocks CDC and South West Pittsburgh CDC should work with local employers (such as Ohio Valley General Hospital and LIFE Pittsburgh) to develop programs that include incentives and subsidies for home purchases in McKees Rocks and Esplen, either as part of their hiring packages or as a benefit of employment. Businesses that are attracted to the study area should be able to join into a program to further encourage integration within the community.

The McKees Rocks CDC and the South West Pittsburgh CDC should engage with the PCRG to identify small portfolios of homes that meet the requirement of PCRG's Recycle programs to be purchased and renovated. As McKees Rocks is increasingly perceived as an up-and-coming urban area, the McKees Rocks CDC should work to market housing in McKees Rocks and Esplen to younger people, singles, and other cohorts for whom the school district is of less concern.

The McKees Rocks CDC should identify a high-visibility block of four to six homes to purchase and redevelop to make available for sale to spearhead neighborhood stabilization. The McKees Rocks CDC should kick-start this effort but leverage its time by working with a developer or contractor to implement the project. These units could be marketed to those already renting or working in McKees Rocks and Esplen or those outside the community. By developing a block of homes at one time, this shows that steps are being taken to revitalize the community and can encourage additional investors that might otherwise have passed on McKees Rocks and Esplen.

Hays Manor

The Hays Manor housing project is perceived as a blight on McKees Rocks. It is an aged and poorly designed public housing facility that physically and psychologically isolates its residents from the surrounding community and inhibits their sense of belonging. The long-obsolete design



RALPH NUÑEZ/OLI



RALPH NUÑEZ/OLI

The Hays Manor site.

of the housing units, which face the back of a strip mall, is uninspiring to residents and does not complement the surrounding community architecturally.

Hays Manor is made up of 14 three-story buildings of that include 138 dwelling units constructed between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s. The most recent renovation occurred 16 years ago, and the units have not been updated except during unit turnover. The complex primarily serves families, as is evidenced in its unit mix: 24 one-bedroom, 72 two-bedroom, 36 three-bedroom, and six four-bedroom units. The buildings and units themselves are old and outdated and concentrate poverty in a relatively small area in the McKees Rocks downtown.

This situation contributes to a generational cycle of poverty despite efforts to improve the quality of life for residents through strategic programming. There are some issues with drugs and crime in the project, but interviewees

Hays Manor is cut off from McKees Rocks by the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing. Blank walls are unattractive and detract from the quality of life. Creative measures, such as murals or landscaping, should be taken to enliven the space. Murals could potentially represent the history and future of McKees Rocks.



RALPH WÓRZEJULI

primarily attributed crime and safety issues to run-down, vacant, and blighted houses in McKees Rocks. The property itself is well maintained and most recently received a U.S. Housing and Urban Development Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) inspection score of 95 on a scale of 1 to 100. That score is likely a reflection of the Housing Authority's high-quality maintenance program. Regardless, Hays Manor is perceived negatively and contributes to the negative perception of McKees Rocks as a whole.

For McKees Rocks to improve its reputation, the Hays Manor site should be demolished and the site redeveloped as mixed-income housing.

Redevelopment of the Hays Manor Site

The Hays Manor site is well located in McKees Rocks and near downtown Pittsburgh to attract renters. Redeveloping the Hays Manor site as mixed-income housing will yield multiple benefits. First, it will desegregate the neighborhood in terms of household income and revitalize the neighborhood. Second, the higher achievable market rents will partly subsidize the expense of developing low-income units. Third (maybe first), a proposed redevelopment option to reconnect the grid, integrate the neighborhood, and create a diversity of uses and incomes would contribute to establishing an active downtown.

The Allegheny County Housing Authority has indicated an interest in partnering to redevelop the Hays Manor site into a mixed-income community. The panel recommends high standards for design and amenities to attract market renters. Another key decision will be in the defined mix of renter incomes. The housing authority's funding requires a specific amount of very low-income units, usually at 30



PAUL ANGELONE/ULI

MetroTowns at Parkside is a three-bedroom, 2.5- and 3.5-bathroom townhouse development in Washington, D.C. Buyers are restricted to making 40 to 100 percent of the area median income.

percent of area median income (AMI). If low-income housing tax credits (LIHTCs) and other sources of affordable housing subsidies are used for low-income units, then residents would be restricted to those earning below 60 percent AMI. Market-rate units are not tied to AMI but will likely serve those considered "workforce" residents, at 80 to 120 percent of AMI. The rents of market-rate units will be tied to the success of McKees Rocks, whereas the rents of the income-restricted units will remain affordable as McKees Rocks and Esplen develop.

Other options for housing restricted-income renters include dedicated senior housing units, possibly paired with a new Allegheny County Housing Authority headquarters and placed within walking distance of amenities such as park space, a grocery store, a pharmacy, and the LIFE Pittsburgh senior day health center. Options for families could



JIZARA/FLICKR

Single-family townhouses were built along the Indiana Central Canal in downtown Indianapolis.

include apartments or renovated row houses or duplexes owned and managed by the housing authority, a concept frequently referred to as “scattered site” housing.

Existing Hays Manor residents should be relocated to more modern and functional housing that better integrates them into their community and provides a better quality of life. Qualified residents should be included in an expanded McKees Rocks CDC homeownership program.

Support for Immigration and Refugee Resettlement Programs

McKees Rocks has lost more than 10,000 residents since the 1950s. This decline has reduced the buying power and density of the borough. Stabilizing the population in owner-occupied housing is critical to moving McKees Rocks and Esplen forward. Supporting immigration and refugee resettlement programs is a way to rapidly and effectively repopulate the area. Allegheny County has recently recognized that immigration and refugee resettlement programs can bring positive economic benefits to communities. Community leaders recently released “A Community Blueprint: Helping Immigrants Thrive in Allegheny County,” a comprehensive, countywide, and community-led strategic plan.

By 2025, immigration will account for more than half of U.S. population growth if current trends continue and there is no major alteration of federal immigration policy. The Research Institute for Housing America of the Mortgage Bankers Association anticipates that one-third of the next decade’s approximately 2.9 million new homeowner households and 1.1 million renter households will be immigrants. Many of these immigrants are highly educated middle- and upper-class families with substantial purchasing power and an interest in purchasing a home. Increasing immigration can transform McKees Rocks and Esplen into a gateway community that attracts further immigration, growth, and neighborhood stabilization.

The McKees Rocks CDC, South West Pittsburgh CDC, and borough of McKees Rocks should work with Allegheny County and others to attract immigrant populations to renovate homes, open businesses, and stabilize the

Net New Households in the United States, 2015–2025

	Owner-occupied	Renter-occupied
Foreign-born	2,949,360	1,097,056
Native-born	5,243,308	3,122,389

Sources: Research Institute for Housing America, ULI.

community. This strategy should be combined with more conventional programs, such as employer-assisted housing programs through the Ohio Valley General Hospital or LIFE Pittsburgh. Programs through the Allegheny County Housing Authority’s vacant property recovery program also should be explored.

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership

The Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership (SWMHP) is a nonprofit community development corporation that serves 30 counties in rural Minnesota. The SWMHP focuses on homeownership and offers educational opportunities and resource development to help empower the community. Resources include homebuyer education; one-on-one mortgage, refinancing, and foreclosure counseling; a home maintenance course; healthy housing education; financial literacy training; a youth careers camp; college scholarships; lender and realtor training; and affordable loan products.

Because of its low cost of living and opportunities for low-skill employment in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, the region has seen an influx of immigrants and refugees. This inflow has required the SWMHP to adapt programs to meet the increasing diversity of residents. The SWMHP has created community cultural working groups that provide residents with opportunities to support community organizing. Activities include block meetings, resident and community engagement, resource development, and training in resident leadership and other skills. These activities help both the immigrants and existing residents better create a more inclusive and open community.

More information can be found at www.swmhp.org.

Focusing on immigration and refugee resettlement might be a challenge to some current residents of McKees Rocks and Esplen, but the program would build on the historic nature of McKees Rocks as a working-class ethnic enclave. The parents and grandparents of many residents were themselves immigrants. The community identity needs to be inclusive and welcoming and should look to the future and not just the past. McKees Rocks and Esplen cannot be associated with a particular race or ethnicity. Instead, the attitude should be that if you are willing to work hard, then the community wants you. Any community building activities should be inclusive of new immigrants and resettled refugees. This effort can help bridge potential divides between any cultural differences.

School District

The underfunded and underperforming school district is a strong disincentive to younger families that might consider moving into McKees Rocks. The panel recommends that the school district investigate consolidating the Sto-Rox School District with a surrounding district. The previous

Sto-Rox merger has proved to be an insufficient consolidation to deal with challenges faced by the school system.

The panel has detected an undercurrent of reluctance to merge with the Pittsburgh Public Schools because of their perceived similar underperformance. Despite these perceptions, the panel notes that the Pittsburgh Public School system would provide McKees Rocks students with significantly enhanced academic opportunities and resources. Opportunities would include access to the Pittsburgh Promise, magnet schools, and a wider array of sports and other extracurricular activities, among other programs.

Community Identity

GREATER McKEES ROCKS is losing a perception battle that stymies new investment, active participation in the community, and a sense of place. Population and employment loss, as well as a legacy of adult entertainment and crime, are realities that shape how the community thinks of itself, and how others think of it.

Equally real are many assets, such as an intact and walkable downtown, a budding resurgence of working-class families, access to both Pittsburgh's downtown and the airport, transportation infrastructure, and frontage on two waterways. These advantages, however, are too often overlooked or underused. Although individual stakeholders may identify McKees Rocks with those assets, the strengths are not part of a larger narrative of the community. Equally problematic is that neighboring communities—Esplen in particular—do not share any greater community identity, despite sharing many physical, social, environmental, economic, and historical ties. Historic reluctance by political leaders from McKees Rocks and Esplen to foster greater collaboration must be overcome.

A unique and distinguished old trash can showing the gritty and beautiful character of McKees Rocks.



JUGGERNAUTCOFLICKR

Transforming Perceptions

A concerted effort to develop and communicate a new community identity—through branding, events, strategic media coverage, and more—can go a long way toward changing this perception and should be a focus of the McKees Rocks CDC and neighboring stakeholders.

Although the goal would be to create a community identity that speaks to the present and future, history of the area cannot be ignored. McKees Rocks has and will continue to have a rich industrial base. It has and will continue to value a strong working class, and it will work to rebuild that population. It has and will continue to be a place where people of various races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes mix and create community.

As the panel recommends throughout this document, the McKees Rocks CDC needs to focus its efforts on two major initiatives: (a) downtown development and (b) building homeownership by various segments of the population. This perception—that the greater McKees Rocks area is a great place to live and work—must be part of that



ALISA CONSTABLE/OLI

A proposed future creekfront park within Esplen on property currently owned by ALCOSAN and entered under a railroad bridge from Sheraden Park.

Community Sustainability and Civic Engagement

When communities are fully active and engaged in the process of community building, they feel a sense of pride and ownership that in turn excites and motivates residents. Thus, residents and businesses become “brand ambassadors”—the city’s biggest advocates.

The panel recommends that partnerships form and strengthen between nonprofits, educational and development organizations, jurisdictions, and regional entities that will enable revitalization of McKees Rocks and Esplen. Each organization should tackle key areas of community issues to help each of the other partners reach their mission and economic goals. Partnerships that do not work are those that are run and managed by organizations that are operating outside their key mission areas. Partners can range from the local police department, community colleges, and faith-based organizations to national programs such as City Year.

■ **Continuing education programs.** Partnerships with local community colleges, the Ohio Valley General

Hospital, and vocational training centers should provide classes locally (either through a permanent “annex campus” or in specialized classes) with curriculums targeted at skilled job opportunities located within McKees Rock from clerical to labor careers. It would be a win/win opportunity, because economic benefits would accrue to all partners and because such programs would eliminate transportation barriers for residents who desire training.

■ **Community and public safety leaders.** To increase public safety, community leaders must develop relationships with the residents. The development of a community policing program may instill a sense of responsibility for the community. Financial grants are available through the COPS program, which runs through the U.S. Department of Justice to provide grants for community policing development and anti-heroin programs. More information about the program, including case studies and best practices, can be found here: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/>.

reimagined community identity. Potential residents must believe that whether working with their hands, or in the arts, social services, health, or transportation fields, they can work hard and own a high-quality home in the greater McKees Rocks area.

To take advantage of the proximity to downtown and to attract a mix of homebuyers looking for a short commute, homeownership, an *up-and-coming gritty* urban community, and riverfront living, the borough, McKees Rocks CDC, Esplen community, and other stakeholders must embrace the goals of developing a vibrant downtown, enhanced recreational amenities, and improved schooling. The McKees Rocks CDC cannot—and should not—be solely responsible for all the actions required to make this vision a reality. Other organizations need to take the lead on those areas that do not fall to the McKees Rocks CDC. Some capacity building and succession planning may be required to ensure the right partner takes control of programs within their key mission, goals, and geographic area.

Taken as a whole, the crucial elements of this emerging identity can be boiled down to these ideas: real, urban, gritty, work, live, river, home. A savvy branding professional can do a lot with such iconic and elemental notions. What McKees Rocks is not—is new. The branding surrounding the “New Town” plan, developed by students at Carnegie Mellon University, should be scrapped, and instead the focus should be on what makes McKees Rocks and Esplen unique.

Branding

The McKees Rocks CDC, in partnership with the South West Pittsburgh CDC, should undertake a branding exercise to establish the key themes, messages, imagery, and tone of a deliberate, curated community identity. This identity and brand can then be used by multiple partners—including the borough of McKees Rocks, the city of Pittsburgh, and community businesses—to market events in the community, develop a wayfinding and signage program to guide a full range of visitors, and, more broadly,

Expand Community Communication Efforts

Strengthening digital communications efforts would keep residents engaged and provide updates via digital platforms. The existing McKees Rocks CDC communications director could lead this effort. A messaging strategy would include providing news on event happenings, emergency notifications, local school notifications, construction and important traffic information, and CDC and city leadership updates.

- **Community forums.** Expand community in-person experiences that include a variety of events and other activities that are inclusive of all ages and economic groups in McKees Rocks. A community-led forum could enhance relationships through conversations and elevate concerns that leaders and activists may not be aware of. Communication can be a catalyst to get ahead of current and potential issues.

- **Social media platforms.** Social media can be used to spread general announcements as well as timely notifications. Key platforms that cities have found effective and that actively engage residents include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- **Hashtags.** Hashtags are a natural way in which people communicate across social platforms. Embracing a hashtag for McKees Rock (#McKeesRocks or #TheRocks) would increase branding efforts and would help people interested in the borough easily locate updates no matter which digital platforms they use.

Examples of successful uses of social media by municipalities can be found at <https://twitter.com/nycgov> and <https://www.civicplus.com/blog/seven-ways-local-government-can-use-social-media>.



Some have a negative perception of McKees Rocks and Esplen, but residents care about the community.



The URL for the McKees Rocks CDC website as displayed on the side of the Roxian Theatre.

sell the new identity. Performance venues and events that draw regionally can be leveraged to put McKees Rocks into the minds of people, who will see a lively place and want to return. That buzz builds on itself.

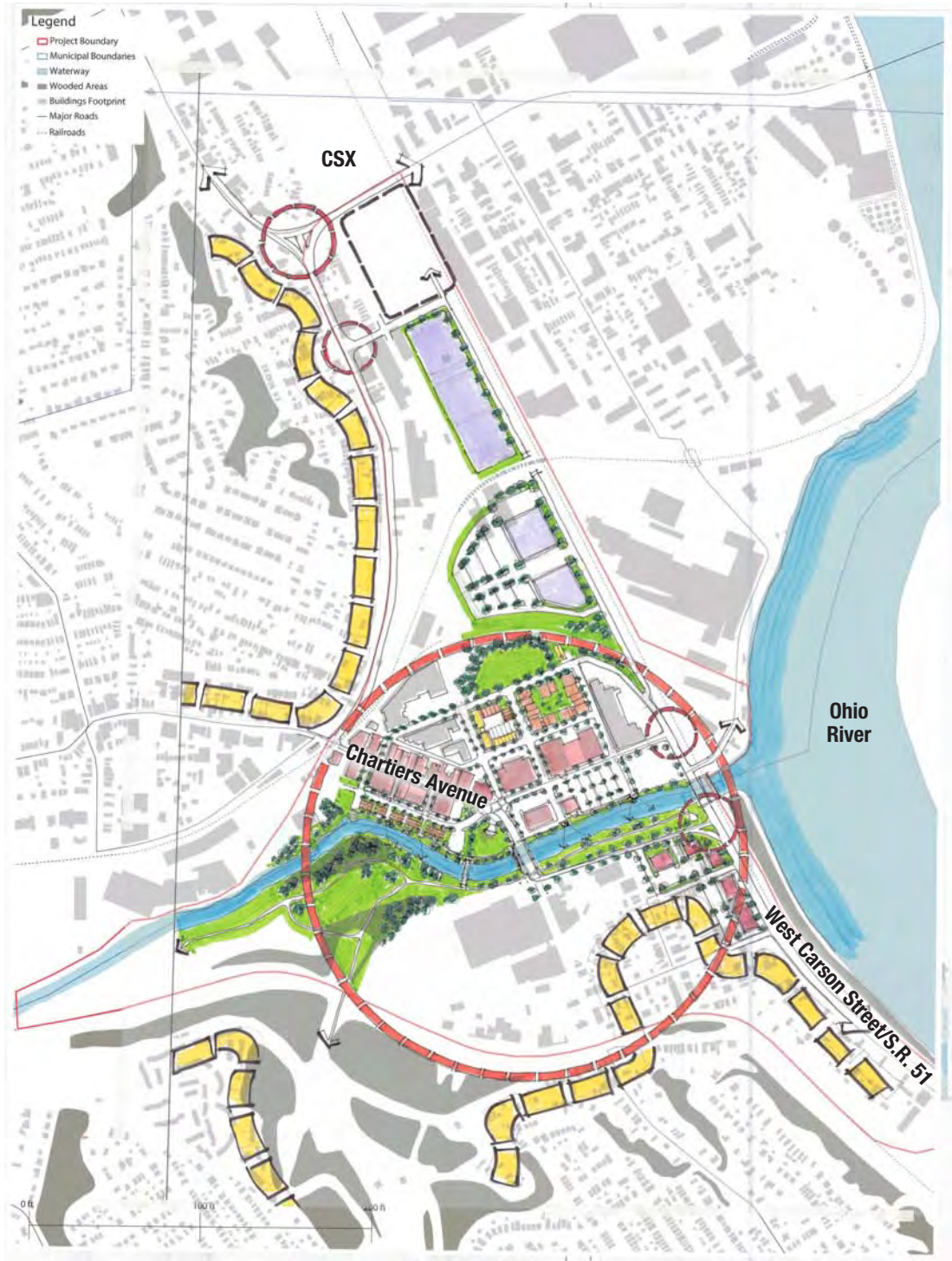
A successful branding process would

- Leverage the authentic identity of the Rocks that includes industrial and arts opportunities;
- Foster relationships between the community and decision makers; and
- Increase residents' pride of living in McKees Rocks.

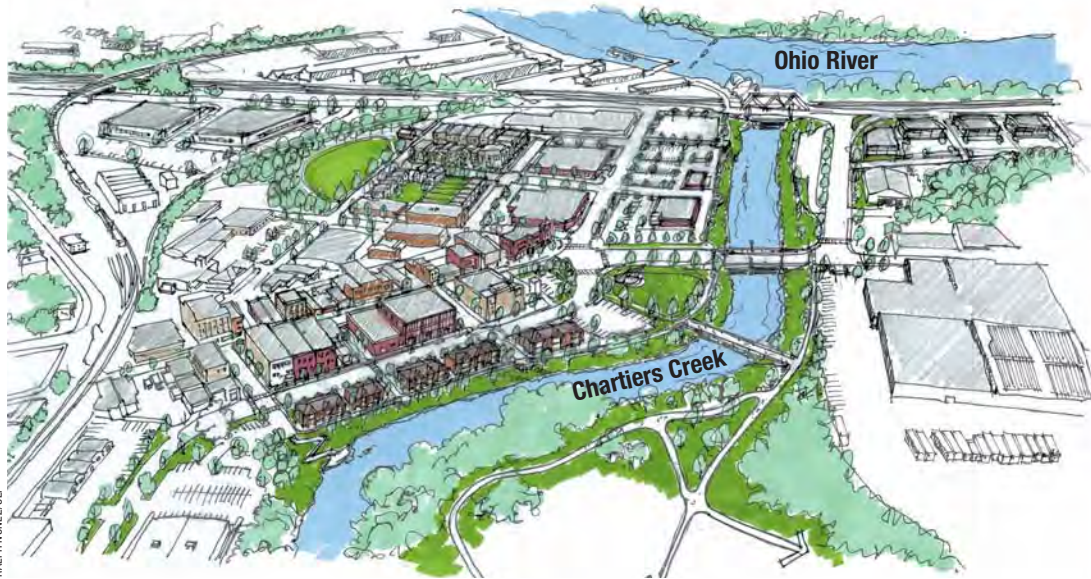
Physical Plan

As stressed throughout this document, in the near term the McKees Rocks CDC must focus on development of homeownership and on downtown development activities. The downtown development efforts have two primary parts:

- Implement the downtown McKees Rocks master plan to ensure a distinct, walkable downtown environment along Chartiers Avenue (and longer term, on the creek frontage of the Furnace Street Extension and toward the Ohio River), with a focus on local businesses, unique eating

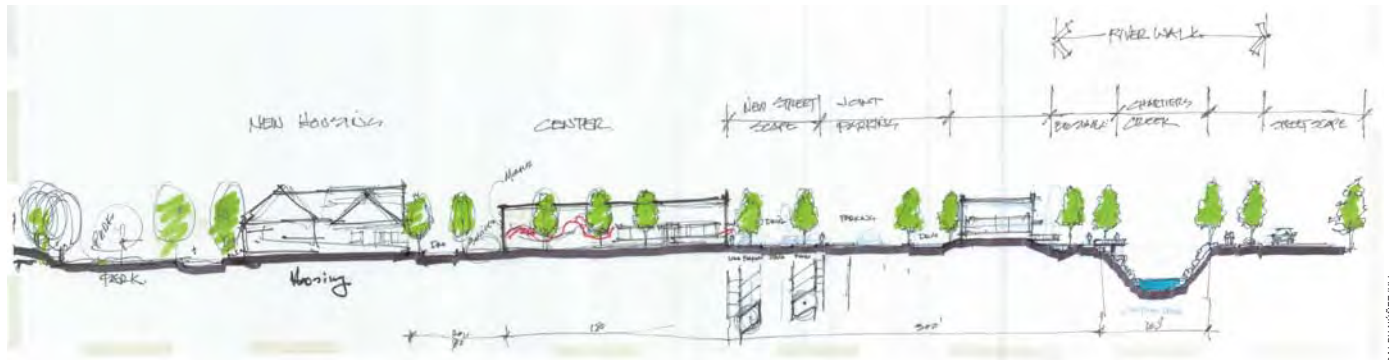


The ULI panel's conceptual site plan for the study area; this plan represents a medium-term period. The circles represent areas that will have additional traffic or pedestrian activity.



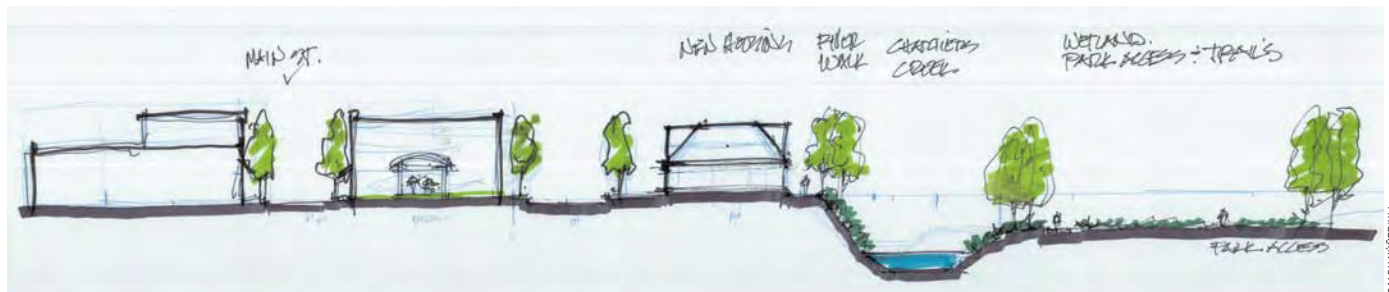
RALPH NÚÑEZ LULI

Bird's-eye view of the panel's conceptual site plan.



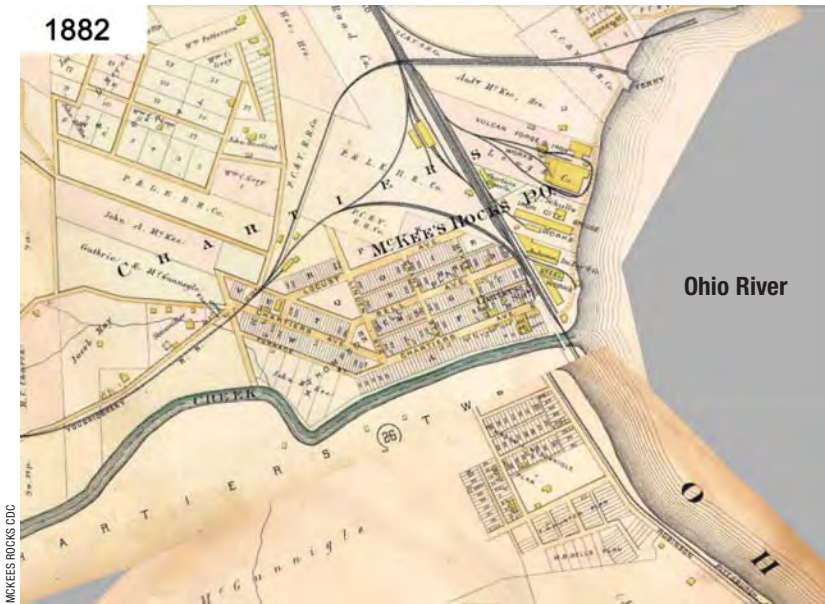
RALPH NÚÑEZ LULI

Elevation showing a cross section of Esplan, Chartiers Creek, the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing, and a reimagined Hays Manor. The plan includes overlooks on a new creekside trail.



RALPH NÚÑEZ LULI

Elevation showing a cross section of a new park, Chartiers Creek, housing, and Chartiers Avenue.



An 1882 map of McKees Rocks shows the borough's original street grid.

establishments, live music, waterfront activities, and a mix of other specialty options.

- Drive development and activity to the gateway intersection of Chartiers and Linden avenues, Furnace Street, and the creek, with the ultimate goal of creating a public plaza, a town center with offices and retail space, and access to an improved shopping plaza.

These two geographies, while in immediate proximity, offer fundamentally different opportunities for retail and other real estate development. The opportunities are explored in the Market Research and Economic Development section of this report. They would allow for community identity to be built, expressed, and shared in different ways.

One major element of the McKees Rocks CDC's efforts at developing Chartiers Avenue should be a substantial expansion of public events to activate the downtown, excite current and future residents, attract visitors, and begin to shift perception of the community. These efforts should start immediately, using existing vacant land and building off the success of Festival. Success of these efforts needs to be judged by factors of increasing community

pride and external awareness of the community's burgeoning resurgence, not in terms of dollars generated.

The McKees Rocks CDC should focus staff time and resources on developing and marketing a fuller calendar of events. The activities need to be carefully curated, however, to convey the notion of a community that works, builds things, and takes pride in itself. For example, live music should be a focal point, but provide blues and rock, not chamber music. Movie screenings, farmers' and makers' markets, industrial arts shows, a craft beer and spirits festival all could work. Creative thinking about programming of visible downtown spaces does not need to be limited to festive events. A mural campaign, temporary art installations, and interactive opportunities such as classes and fitness programs can be low-cost activation opportunities.

Reimagined Gateway and Creekfront Plaza

The McKees Rocks CDC's other business development focus—the gateway intersection of Chartiers and Linden avenues, Furnace Street, and the creek—also will include elements of building and spreading community identity.

First, that gateway must be where McKees Rocks and Esplen visibly and functionally connect to create one community centered on a shared waterfront and retail area. The reality today is that residents cross the creek in multiple directions to shop, attend church, commute, see family, and more. The creek and the municipal border don't truly affect the patterns of residents' lives, and thinking long term, investments in the creek and even a rethinking of municipal borders would convert those current barriers into connectors. Gateway features, such as artwork or lighting, should convey grit, hard work, and pride but also foster a shared identity between McKees Rocks and Esplen.

Although one real estate development goal for the gateway intersection is the development of town center elements—government or private offices, an improved bus stop, new wayfinding—a long-term goal of the McKees Rocks CDC and the borough should be the development of a public

Addressing Climate Change and Extreme Weather

Two reports from the Urban Land Institute can help identify issues and recommend strategies to mitigate against hazardous events. *A Guide to Assessing Climate Change Risk* provides an overview of the risk assessment process. *Resilience Strategies along the Rural–Urban Transect* provides strategies to build community resilience in differing urban, rural, or natural typologies.

Wetlands looking toward lower Chartiers Avenue help address stormwater runoff.



JOSH ELLIS/UJI

plaza, connected to creek frontage enhancements, that allows for the programming and events managed by the CDC, local churches, or other organizations to move off vacant land (and then that land should be redeveloped). Simply landscaping a former parking lot or vacant space will not create a town center. The plaza should be the result of thoughtfully created urban space that includes the critical elements of the right kinds of buildings with the right kinds of uses surrounding and defining its edges and activities.

Hays Manor and Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing

The panel recommends removing a section of the strip center, thereby opening it up to create a new circulation pattern into the Hays Manor site. This modification will create a more modern retail circulation pattern and open up the Hays Manor site to the surrounding community. Opening the strip center would restore the original McKees Rocks street grid. To compensate the property owner for the loss of revenue from removing a portion of the strip center, additional pads can be created near Chartiers Creek from unused parking spaces.

In the longer term, as the market dictates, the existing strip mall buildings could be replaced with larger mixed-use buildings that include commodity retail space such as grocery stores and pharmacies.

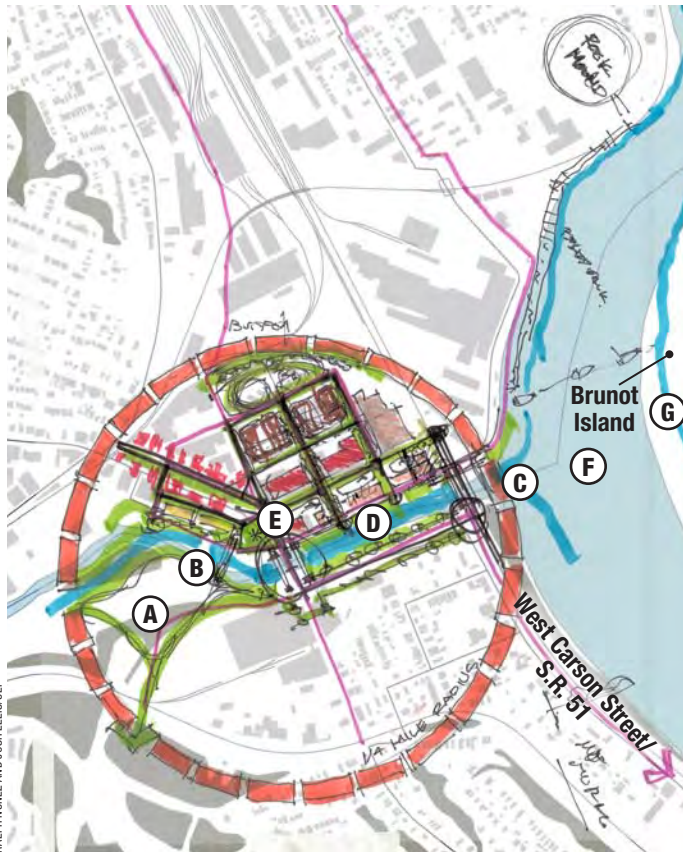
The McKees Rocks CDC should explore the development of senior housing on the Hays Manor site with the Allegh-

eny County Housing Authority, an experienced affordable senior housing developer, or both. The owner of a small area of land behind Hays Manor, the Genesee & Wyoming railroad, has indicated that it would likely be willing to part with a portion of this property, retaining a narrow rail right-of-way for potential future use. This additional land would provide a larger building footprint or land for green space.

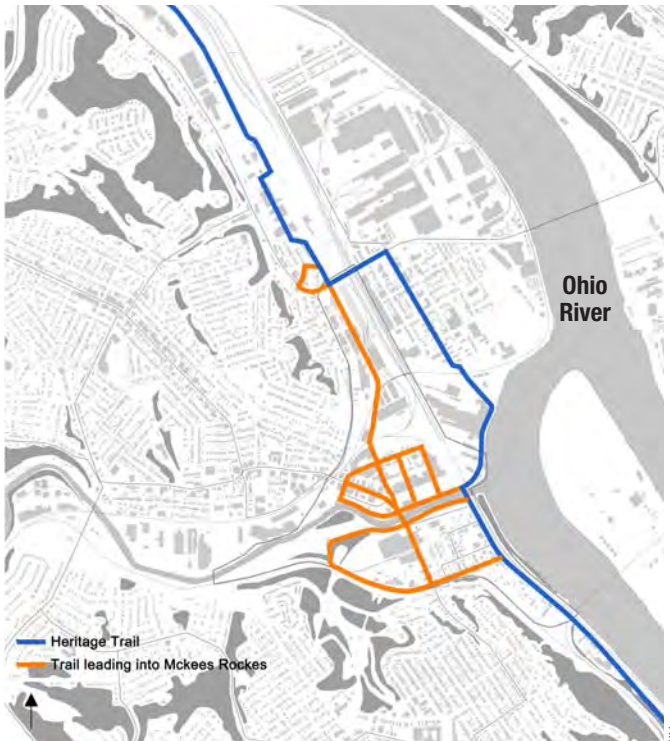
Although not the highest use for the site in the long term, for the foreseeable future the automobile dealership on the site can help the area's redevelopment by bringing customers to the study area. Potentially, the dealership's main parking lot could be reduced and a majority of the cars stored at an off-site location elsewhere in McKees Rocks or in Esplen. Thus, the dealership could continue to operate at its current address but with a more consolidated footprint that would better enable the walkability desired by the community.

Waterfront Improvement Plan

This creekfront plaza would be one component of a broader set of waterfront improvements to take maximum advantage of those natural assets. Even though the McKees Rocks CDC should advocate for this broader suite of waterfront investments, and might be the active lead on two components of it, this project cannot and should not be the sole responsibility of the McKees Rock CDC. Instead, a collaborative planning and investment effort will need to occur between the city of Pittsburgh, McKees Rocks Borough, Riverlife, Citiparks, the U.S. Army Corps of



RALPH INÓNEZ AND JOSH ELLIS/ULI



A proposed extension of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail (represented in blue) as well as other potential routes (in orange) would increase cycling and recreation opportunities within the study area.

Illustration of potential phasing of a waterfront component over a five- to 15-year period. Letters correspond with proposed components.

Engineers, South West Pittsburgh CDC, Allegheny County Sanitary Authority, many other stakeholders, and the McKees Rocks CDC. The CDC does not have the capacity to lead a planning and implementation effort of this magnitude, but it does have a role to play, and it can be a vocal advocate for ensuring that the project happens.

As envisioned here, waterfront development could occur in several different components. The sequence of components is intended to build from each other over the course of five to 15 years.

- **Component A:** Redevelop Sheraden Park, incorporating ALCOSAN-owned land on the southern bank of Chartiers Creek. Although any infrastructure developed here would need to be designed to withstand occasional high water, the connection between the existing Sheraden Park and the creekfront creates an opportunity for walking paths, picnic facilities, and paddling and boat access.

This project would provide the communities of Esplen, Sheraden, Chartiers City, Crafton Heights, and Windgap with access to the creek.

- **Component B** (CDC effort, consistent with downtown development): Develop a pedestrian bridge from the Furnace Street Extension to the ALCOSAN land, as well as some combination of residences, offices, retail, and dining facing the creek on Furnace Street. A rental facility for kayaks and canoes could also be considered.
- **Component C:** Develop a formal marina on the Ohio River, at the mouth of the creek, in McKees Rocks. Because this is east of the CSX mainline, access to this site might need to be reconfigured.
- **Component D:** Develop walking paths, landscaping, and vegetated buffers on both sides of the creek from Linden Avenue to Carson Street, effectively connecting Sheraden Park and the ALCOSAN land to the marina,

Active Transportation

The community should promote health, equity, and sustainability by investing in active transportation infrastructure projects, such as trails and greenways—investments that can create real estate value and promote economic development. Consider that 50 percent of U.S. residents surveyed said that walkability is a top priority or a high priority when they consider where to live, according to the Urban Land Institute's *America in 2015* report.

Benefits

- Well-built active projects may help to transform the perception of McKees Rocks, increase real estate equity, and promote health within the community.
- The pedestrian and bike path would allow those who work and live in McKees Rocks to enjoy the “simple things” in life, take time to reconnect, and help to increase physical activity.
- Such projects keep people active regardless of their age.

Note

- With an increase not only in truck traffic in McKees Rocks, but also in cycling, walking, and car traffic, a need for increased signage may emerge.
- Bike parking should be considered as well as bike lanes.

Opportunities and Ideas

- Recreational activities could be offered along the pedestrian paths, including small outdoor gyms with monkey bars, steps, and so on, that would enable residents to become more physically fit.
- Stops, such as benches and water fountains, should be placed along the path to help cyclists and pedestrians enjoy McKees Rocks along the way.

Additional information can be found within ULI's *Building Healthy Places Toolkit*, bhptoolkit.uli.org/.

creating a loop path integrated with new development in the strip center parking lot.

- *Component E* (CDC effort, consistent with gateway development): Establish a true civic gathering place along the creek, visible from both McKees Rocks and Esplen.
- *Component F*: Develop a water trail of boat launches further upstream on the creek.
- *Component G*: Develop Brunot Island, with an auto bridge connecting to McKees Rocks, ferry service, and a riverfront path or boardwalk connecting the creek trail to the historic McKees Rocks burial mound site.

Additional Areas of Consideration

Two other major projects—the development of a formal, well-funded, and well-programmed historic site at the McKees Rocks burial mound and the establishment of a bike trail connector through the community to link to regional trails to the north and south—would also comple-

ment these activities, bolster a McKees Rocks identity, and bring people to the community. Again, the McKees Rocks CDC can support these and play a limited strategic role as a local champion, but the CDC should not adopt these as focus areas. Given its limited resources, the McKees Rocks CDC must focus on the daunting undertaking of stabilizing homeownership and bolstering the downtown.

A new community identity can inspire investment, pride, and stewardship in long-time residents, new homeowners, businesses, and visitors. The identity can embrace the gritty past and future of this hardworking community while also conveying the excitement and energy of new entertainment venues, a lively downtown, a vibrant town center, and a truly unique waterfront environment in the setting of a small, urban community. That is no small challenge, but with a focused effort by the McKees Rocks CDC, in coordination with the South West Pittsburgh CDC, it is possible.

Leadership and Governance

THE McKEES ROCKS CDC has been doing impressive work in the community and has established a wide network of knowledgeable professionals. The work ahead, including the recommendations in this study, will be demanding and will require the leadership and the McKees Rocks CDC staff members to prepare themselves to meet the challenge. To maximize its fullest potential, the McKees Rocks CDC organization must be recalibrated to focus on its original mission and beliefs: to facilitate investment, restore community pride, and attract and retain residents and businesses.

McKees Rocks CDC Vision

We will enjoy a safe, diverse, and thriving residential and business community capitalizing on the natural competitive advantage of our location and access.

Mission

The mission of MRCDC is to facilitate investment and restore community pride to attract and retain residents and businesses.

Beliefs

- *Integrity*—Honesty and transparency are critical to achieving transformational results.
- *Commitment*—Continued diligence is necessary to facilitate community development and achieve our long-term vision.
- *Collaboration*—Partnerships for development and investment are vital to our organization's sustainability and the community's success.
- *Heritage*—Treasuring our rich history will enrich our future accomplishment.

Focus of the McKees Rocks CDC

As a result of this study, the panel strongly recommends that the McKees Rocks CDC reevaluate its mission and area of focus. After much thought and research, the panel believes that the McKees Rocks CDC's primary focus should be in the following areas:

- Establishing a commercial core on lower Chartiers Avenue;
- Developing a path to homeownership for residents in McKees Rocks; and
- Maintaining a strong CDC presence in McKees Rocks.

Establish a Commercial Core on Chartiers Avenue

Establishing a commercial core on lower Chartiers Avenue would include a focus on infill lot usage, attraction, continuation of the existing facade program, and streetscape improvements. Great care should be taken to encourage a design that reflects the current character of the community. The CDC should recruit new business, retain the existing business mix, and work to improve the main street experience.

As part of retention, the panel encourages the McKees Rocks CDC to establish a Chartiers Avenue business association with existing stakeholders (property and business owners, Rotary, Teamsters). Ideally, this organization would grow beyond the control of the CDC in the future and would operate as an independent entity. The group should establish a regular open forum for residents, business owners, and public officials to interact. The meetings should not be a forum for formal presentations by CDC leadership to the community, but a regularly scheduled informal gathering and sharing of ideas.



A mural painted on a Santa Fe Railroad crossing in Pinole, California. The McKees Rocks CDC and the borough could work with Genesee & Wyoming Railroad to paint its bridge at Chartiers Avenue.

In an effort to increase the transparency of the McKees Rocks CDC, the panel recommends that McKees Rocks work with an expert on a strategic media and social media plan for McKees Rocks and its CDC and ensure that the result is a task owned by a staff member moving forward. The McKees Rocks CDC must do more than report the good things happening in the community. The organization must be a reliable resource for news—good and bad. The McKees Rocks CDC should take a position when things go wrong and explain the path forward. This transparency will help encourage trust, dispel rumors, and give commercial district updates to promote a more positive brand of McKees Rocks.

Develop a Path to Homeownership in McKees Rocks

The effort to develop and implement a path to homeownership in McKees Rocks should start with the identification of partners and resources in this realm, creation of a multifaceted marketing plan that targets several population segments (worker housing, families, and young professionals without children, empty-nesters, immigrants, etc.), and implementation of a homeownership program. The panel recommends that a position be added to the McKees Rocks CDC staff to focus on these efforts.

Maintain a Strong CDC Presence in McKees Rocks

Efforts should be made to ensure that the CDC's board and staff priorities remain aligned. The panel recommends that the board revisit the CDC's mission statement to more clearly define the focus of the McKees Rocks CDC. Current statements like “attract and retain residents and businesses” are loaded with the potential for thousands of activities and potential programs. With a mission this broad, the CDC risks diluting its efforts with a tendency to “fill in the gaps” in the community. One example would be the current passion project related to nutrition. Although this program may be helping the residents of the community, the panel does not see it as the most impactful place for the CDC to spend staff time and energy toward a revitalization effort. Instead, the CDC might find a partner in the health and wellness field to offer a similar service. Similarly, the panel recommends that the CDC align with strong partners who can take the lead role on the following efforts:

- Waterfront, park, and trail development;
- Youth engagement;
- Industrial development; and
- Social services.

These partnerships will avoid diluting the McKees Rocks CDC's efforts and enable its staff members to have a seat at the table to maintain the overall vision of the community without the weight of driving the entire vision forward themselves. This can be an opportunity for the other private, governmental, educational, and nonprofit organizations within the McKees Rocks and Esplan to step up their leadership and capacity in improving the community.

Board and Mentorship Development

As evidenced by numerous interviews, the McKees Rocks CDC has been knocking down silos and positioning itself for success. Its staff and board members are highly thought of in the region at a local and state level. To ensure that the board and organization remain strong,

the panel recommends that the McKees Rocks CDC focus on existing and future board composition in an effort to further the mission of the McKees Rocks CDC and the borough. The existing board of directors has served as true “cheerleaders” for the organization through board support and confidence. To incorporate the Esplen neighborhood as a neighbor, inviting a representative responsible for the future of that area may be a positive addition to the board. The McKees Rocks CDC may also want to diversify to include industrial sector representation on the board.

As the organization continues to grow and assume a larger role within the community, the panel recommends that the board be composed of members who possess the following traits to assist the organization in its effort to redevelop McKees Rocks:

- Extensive professional network within the metropolitan Pittsburgh area;
- Sharp and attuned business and political acumen with access to decision makers; and
- Knowledge of potential funding sources and access to capital.

It is clear that the board of directors, the leadership, and staff of McKees Rocks CDC are committed and have done an outstanding job with redevelopment efforts within the study area. As the issues become more complex, a her-

culean effort will be required to take McKees Rocks CDC from good to great. In addition, to ensure the organization is on that path to success, the panel recommends that the executive director align himself with an economic development veteran or team of veterans as a mentor.

This mentorship team could help provide strategic, political, and financial advice to enable the McKees Rocks community to implement some of the recommendations within this report. The advice could serve as a sort of “super-executive board” to the McKees Rocks CDC as well as add cross-jurisdictional understanding, knowledge, and political power. However, such leadership and mentorship would be independent of the McKees Rocks CDC so that the CDC may focus on its core mission. In addition, the executive director should continue participating in the metropolitan Pittsburgh region in leadership programs like “Leadership Pittsburgh.”

It is the belief of the panel that the McKees Rocks CDC cannot reach its fullest potential without restructuring its board and developing a robust mentorship program for the executive director or a super-executive board. The organization has achieved many great things thus far and the panel believes that by following the above-mentioned recommendations, the organization will be on a continued path to success.

Governance

The panel recognizes that the Esplen portion of the study area is governed by the city of Pittsburgh and not by McKees Rocks. The following recommendations pertain to the governance of the borough of McKees Rocks. After an extensive review of the roles contributing to the future of McKees Rocks, the panelists believe that the McKees Rocks CDC has placed itself in the position of de facto local government by attempting to step in and assume responsibilities for efforts and services that are historically under the umbrella of local government or agencies of local government. The efforts of the McKees Rocks CDC and others appear to be diluted as they attempt to fill in

McKees Rocks CDC Mentor

A potential addition to a mentorship team could be former Pittsburgh mayor Tom Murphy, ULI Canizaro/Klingbeil Families chair for urban development and ULI senior resident fellow. Murphy has extensive experience in urban revitalization—what drives investment, what ensures long-lasting commitment—and has been a key addition to the senior resident fellows’ areas of expertise. Murphy also serves on the advisory board of ULI and the National League of Cities Rose Center for Public Leadership in Land Use.

the gaps of borough governance. It is the panel's opinion that the traditional borough leadership should expand its capacity to make the following services a priority:

- Safety and the elimination of perceived safety concerns in pedestrian-focused areas such as the bridge between McKees Rocks and Esplen;
- Additional trash removal and more frequent street cleaning;
- Emergency management;
- Safety updates; and
- Future combined sewer system separation to address wastewater overflows into the waterways.

In addition, the borough must undertake more complicated tasks that require working with multiple entities, such as

- Untangling the titles of abandoned residential properties;
- Infrastructure improvement pertaining to roads, water, and sewer systems;
- Trail and park planning; and
- Waterway planning.

As a result of several decades of declining employment opportunities, uncollectible property taxes, and increased demand for public services, the borough of McKees Rocks finds itself on unstable financial ground, which may make the stated recommendations seem like wishful thinking. The panel recognizes this, and so recommends that, to better position itself for a sustainable future and address systemic issues like abandoned homes, the borough of McKees Rocks should commission a full feasibility analysis to study and evaluate the following options:

- Full annexation into the city of Pittsburgh;
- Intergovernmental agreements with the city of Pittsburgh to provide essential services such as police, fire, transportation, and trash pickup;

- Full consolidation of government with neighboring borough(s) or townships; and
- Consolidation of school, social, and shared services with neighboring borough(s) or townships.

In the event that annexation or consolidation occurs, the panel encourages McKees Rocks to strive to maintain the existence of its own CDC and to continue to work with the South West Pittsburgh CDC.

Funding Opportunities and Incentive Packages

The panel recommends that the McKees Rocks CDC develop strategic partnerships and alliances to develop a plan to achieve its goals. Leadership must translate the political will and access all available resources into concrete actions and accomplishments. Leadership must marshal the responsible parties and support entities and engage a broad array of stakeholders to perform and execute their respective tasks in a timely and effective manner. This work should include the investigation of funding opportunities and incentive packages. Some examples follow.

Existing Opportunities

- \$2.5 million Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) through Pennsylvania can be used to identify large-scale economic development uses for existing setasides (1:1 match required with targeted creation of 125 jobs).
- \$750,000 in multimodal funding for streetscape improvements from CSX.
- Continue to identify resources available, through lobbyists, that would assist the CDC in identifying potential funding sources at the state and federal level.

Other Potential Opportunities

- Tax increment financing (TIF) could be used as an incentive to jump-start development in the commercial core.
- Payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) could be used over ten years to assist in the redevelopment of the current Hays Manor site.

Target Incentives for the Study Area to Pursue

Group(s)	Sources	
	Primary	Secondary
McKees Rocks and South West Pittsburgh CDCs	Organize available funding streams for specific users (retail, housing, industrial, office)	
	Target to specific ideas and areas of implementation (be strategic)	
	Advocate on behalf of programs, but not lead the charge. Also act as liaison with political officials where appropriate.	
	Federal programs	
	Historic tax credit for possible gap financing to the extent that building stock exists	
Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development	\$2.5 million unused Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program funds	
	Keystone Communities Program	
	Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) funds local government planning to manage inter-governmental development in three ways	Shared services Community planning Floodplain management
	Direct to businesses*	
Allegheny County	Department of Economic Development	Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) funds
		Allegheny County tax increment financing (TIF)
		Tax abatements and exemptions, such as Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA), ten-year tax abatement
	County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN)	Corporate Steward Award
Borough of McKees Rocks	Appropriate use of borough tax abatement	85% cost sharing for innovative sustainable water runoff management (e.g., permeable pavers)
	Corporate Steward Award	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers planning assistance services (with a local match)
Nonprofit resources	Allegheny Conference	
	Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group	Bankers Council
	Vibrant Pittsburgh	
	RiverLife Pittsburgh	
	Foundations	
Financial institutions	Bridgeway Capital Small Business Administration financing	
	Local banks	

This chart shows which partner organizations are necessary to coordinate funding opportunities or incentive packages.

Sources: ULI and entities listed under "Group(s)" heading above.

*Direct to businesses = Economic development authority is providing subsidies/incentives directly to participating companies/businesses.

Note: CDC = community development corporation.

- The EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program could be used as a potential funding source for projects located throughout the borough that meet the minimum required threshold. Participants would have to work with the local Pittsburgh Regional Investment Center.
- Industrial Revenue Bonds could be used as a tool to encourage and provide funding for industrial development in the industrial areas of the borough.
- New markets tax credits could be used to incentivize job creation and retail development.
- Historic preservation income tax credits could be used for redevelopment of the borough's oldest structures.
- Economic development incentives could be offered to companies if the option benefits McKees Rocks while maintaining and growing the borough tax base.
- Real estate tax abatements for new construction have been used effectively in other Pennsylvania communities. In Philadelphia, for example, a ten-year abatement has spurred substantial new residential and commercial construction, especially in the city center.

The depth of the available funding sources can be overwhelming. It is recommended that the McKees Rocks CDC remain committed to the organization's mission statement but work closely with various organizations that have the capacity and ability to execute the development vision for McKees Rocks. This course will enable the vision to be implemented, with the guidance of the borough of McKees Rocks and Esplen, and will help the community identify the most useful funding opportunities and incentive packages. The development potentials and opportunities for McKees Rocks are plentiful if executed properly.

It is imperative that the McKees Rocks CDC coordinate closely with the South West Pittsburgh CDC to ensure that the development vision reflects the needs of the Esplen neighborhood. Despite physical, political, and perception barriers, the McKees Rocks, Stowe Township, and Esplen neighborhood are within the same primary trade area.

Following are longer-term recommendations for the McKees Rocks CDC:

- Commit to improving the shopping experience along lower Chartiers Avenue by attracting new and retaining existing business.
- Establish an effective "Path to Homeownership" program and become the go-to resource for the citizens in the community who seek help to becoming homeowners.
- Maintain a strong CDC presence in McKees Rocks.
- Become a source of information for the community through social media and other media outlets.
- Focus activity in locations that have already been developed and may lend themselves to future development.
- Work closely with the South West Pittsburgh CDC, the borough, and other Stowe Township community development groups.

Conclusion

THE CHALLENGES ARE SO BROAD, the resources so meager, and the McKees Rocks CDC so determined that it seems to have been fighting a war on many fronts. This is one of the key issues the panel's recommendations try to address. Other issues include trying to resolve the inherent conflicts between land uses that are inherently incompatible. The McKees Rocks CDC has done a magnificent job of getting to this point, and it does feel as if the CDC and the community may be nearing an inflection point. The panel thinks that successfully navigating beyond the present to the next level is going to require taking stock of how the McKees Rocks CDC, the borough, and the community will take on the future.

To achieve what is set out in this report, the McKees Rocks CDC needs to focus on two tasks:

1. Bring the community's housing stock back to owner-occupied health; and
2. Turn lower Chartiers Avenue into a fully vital and diverse commercial district.

Although this limits the McKees Rocks CDC's scope to just two tasks, this focus will enable the CDC to bring its amazing capabilities fully to bear on these core issues. That said, it is going to take the resources and cooperation and hard work not just of the McKees Rocks CDC but also of the McKees Rocks borough government, the city of Pittsburgh, South West Pittsburgh CDC, and other players in the region and state. This work is not the responsibility of the McKees Rocks CDC alone, and it should not be seen that way.

The McKees Rocks CDC's decision to engage this panel is a commendable start. The borough of McKees Rocks needs to do its part and honestly appraise whether it can accomplish the things it needs to do—the tasks laid out

in our recommendations to support this effort—on its own. The panel believes the answer is that it probably cannot. So, just as the McKees Rocks CDC must plan how to establish priorities among the many things it wants to do and then step up to the next level of professionalism to concentrate on getting those done (which might entail some difficult organizational decisions), the borough of McKees Rocks, the city of Pittsburgh, and other regional and state partners need to contemplate how they need to change to ensure a positive future for the community. This process will require

- Self-examination,
- Prioritization, and
- Professionalization.

Building on the good things starting to happen, the panel can see a step-by-step path from the McKees Rocks and Esplen community today to the one shown in the panel's physical plan drawings, starting with finishing the Roxian Theatre. Progress is not going to be easy, and the time is more likely to be measured in decades than in years. The panel's advice is this:

- Don't be intimidated by a time frame that spans decades; that is how real estate works.
- Keep in mind that Pittsburgh's model for success, East Liberty, worked for 50 years to bring the neighborhood to where it is today.
- McKees Rocks and Esplen are not alone. Many communities are facing or have faced the same issues you are facing. Your advantage is that you have great bones, plus a working community's instinct to roll up your sleeves and get to it. In other words, you have grit. Celebrate it, because McKees Rocks!

About the Panel

Alan Razak

Panel Chair

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Razak is principal of AthenianRazak LLC, a Philadelphia-based company that consults on, creates, and manages real property. He has four decades of commercial real estate experience, encompassing development and project management, finance, architectural design, and consulting. His diverse real estate background includes managing the development process, both as owner and on a consulting basis as owner's representative, in project types including residential, office, and commercial, as well as specialized expertise in data centers and other highly technical facilities.

AthenianRazak was formed in 2011 in a merger between Athenian Properties and Razak Company, which he founded and led. He was responsible for the development of Main Line Jaguar Land Rover, Pembroke North Condominium, 5035 Ritter Road for the Administrative Office for Pennsylvania Courts, the Curtis Institute of Music's Lenfest Hall, and other projects. He also has led real estate consulting and development assignments for clients including Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania, Walnut Street Theatre, Swarthmore College, the Rock School of Dance, Natural Lands Trust, CSX, Conrail, Digital Realty, Berkadia, Vanguard Group of Mutual Funds, and many others. He currently leads the team developing a new \$80 million practice facility and corporate headquarters for the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers.

Before forming Razak Company in 2003, he was a principal with a Philadelphia real estate consulting and investment advisory firm, consulting on a broad variety of assignments across the spectrum of real estate issues. Throughout the 1980s, as a partner at developer Rouse

& Associates, he managed such high-profile projects as a 400,000-square-foot Washington, D.C., office building and the development of a 20-acre Penn's Landing urban mixed-use project. He began his career as an architect, working on the design of multifamily residential, commercial, and health care projects in the Midwest and Pacific Northwest, and for purely sentimental reasons he maintains his status as a registered architect in Pennsylvania.

He has served on the Central Philadelphia Development Corporation's Board of Directors, is chairman of the board of the Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre, and is a full member of the Urban Land Institute, where he developed and currently teaches several workshops for real estate practitioners internationally. He holds a BS in arts and design from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a master of architecture from the University of Washington, and an MBA with a concentration in real estate from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Michelle Chang

Arlington County, Virginia

Chang is a development manager at Vornado Realty Trust/Charles E. Smith in Arlington, Virginia. She joined the multifamily development team in 2015. She oversees the development of several projects, including the ground-up development of infill buildings in Pentagon City and Reston, Virginia. Both projects take advantage of excess density at Metro-accessible areas, one immediately adjacent to a new Metro Silver Line stop. She is also part of the leadership team tasked with re-envisioning a site critical to the redevelopment of Crystal City as a tech-focused corridor and placemaking hub.

Before joining Vornado/Charles E. Smith, she oversaw the development of low- and mixed-income projects in the

Washington, D.C., and New York City markets. While at AHC Inc., her projects included the renovation of a mixed-income garden style apartment that leveraged historic and low-income tax credits with tax-exempt bond financing in Arlington, Virginia. Her focus in New York for Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples (CCPOP) Development was the redevelopment of a former hospital into affordable housing and supportive services for seniors and developmentally disabled individuals. She also managed the development of residential, commercial, and institutional infill projects at AthenianRazak, including a LEED-certified luxury condominium. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri in Kansas City and her JD from the University of Kansas.

She has been an enthusiastic member of ULI district councils in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, D.C. She cochaired ULI Philadelphia's inaugural Urban Marketplace, was a member of ULI NYC's Housing Council, and is currently on D.C.'s WLI Steering Committee.

Alissa Constable

Washington, D.C.

Constable is the director of content marketing for the Urban Land Institute. She has more than ten years' experience leading marketing campaigns for nonprofit and media companies. Her professional experience includes strategic partnership development, product launches, brand marketing, communication strategies, fundraising, and digital communications.

Before joining ULI, she worked as a marketing consultant with MediaCom and the Michael J. Fox Foundation serving as an adviser for creating corporate branding, increasing fundraising, and leading national marketing campaigns. In addition, she has led marketing programs for the Get Schooled Foundation (Viacom and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), McDonald's Corporation, and Radio One.

She holds a media communications degree from Hunter College. Currently, she serves as an ambassador for the Smithsonian African American Museum in Washington, D.C.

Aletha Dunston

Indianapolis, Indiana

Dunston serves as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program manager with the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) for the state of Indiana. OCRA is a unique state agency that embeds community liaisons within each region of the state to offer practical technical assistance and planning and capacity building assistance to struggling rural communities. In her current role, she disperses approximately \$28 million of federal funding annually throughout the state of Indiana between nine competitive state programs targeted at strategic infrastructure and placemaking efforts.

She joined OCRA in January 2015 after serving eight years as the planning and community development director of Marion, Indiana. There, she wrote the first Comprehensive Plan for the city since 1961 using in-house resources. She also contributed to several large-scale site redevelopment and residential clearance programs. She was very active as hands-on president of the local Main Street and Urban Enterprise organizations as they combated the loss of several downtown businesses and landmarks.

She is a graduate of the College of Architecture and Planning at Ball State University and is enrolled in the Butler University MBA program. She continues to serve on the APA-IN State Planning Association board and strives to support programs that move Indiana and the Midwest forward.

Josh Ellis

Chicago, Illinois

Ellis has been with Chicago's Metropolitan Planning Council since 2006. He directs the MPC's sustainability initiatives, most notably in the fields of stormwater mitigation and water supply management. Through on-the-ground initiatives like the Milwaukee Avenue Green Development Corridor, technical assistance to the Northwest Water Planning Alliance, and facilitation of diverse stakeholder groups—such as the Calumet Stormwater Collaborative—

he leads the MPC's multiple strategies to sustainably manage Illinois' finite water resources and reduce the harmful impacts of stormwater.

He leads many of the MPC's research projects, including Immeasurable Loss: Modernizing Lake Michigan Water Use; Bus Rapid Transit: Chicago's New Route to Opportunity; and Before the Wells Run Dry. He also coordinates MPC's research assistant program, of which he himself is an alumnus.

He is a member of the Midwest Leadership Council of the National Parks Conservation Association, the Cook County Sustainability Advisory Council, and the advisory committee exploring the future of the Chicago Area Waterway System. He is president of the Board at PODER, which serves adult immigrants with a mission to provide the necessary academic tools to promote human dignity, increase employment potential, and facilitate participation in the larger community.

A New Hampshire native, he resides in Chicago's South Loop, where he is a board member of the Greater South Loop Association. He managed a small school in Japan before his graduate studies in public policy and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago. His honors thesis, published in the book *Water, Environmental Security and Sustainable Rural Development: Conflict and Cooperation in Central Eurasia*, compared the political discourse of marsh restoration in southeastern Iraq with the environmental history of the region.

David Greensfelder

San Francisco, California

As a developer, consultant, and an experienced corporate real estate executive, Greensfelder has driven more than 325 projects spanning 6.3 million square feet with an aggregate acquisition and construction value exceeding \$700 million. Since 2008, he has built a \$100 million development pipeline, helped a client acquire a publicly traded competitor, and developed plans to reposition over 1 million square feet of retail and mixed-use projects valued at over \$115 million.

Before forming his own firm, he was director/vice president and principal of LandMark/NewMark's northern California office, managed relationships with Fortune 25 companies such as CVS, led acquisition and development programs for programmatic joint ventures with publicly traded real estate investment trusts (REITs) such as Weingarten Realty Investors, and successfully oversaw real estate strategy and implementation for national promotional and daily needs retailers such as CVS, Longs Drugs, Super Crown Books, and specialty retailers such as Eatzi's (Brinker International), Chuck Jones Showroom, and High Tech Burrito.

He graduated from Pitzer College (Claremont Colleges) with a degree in business economics. He lectures at University of California at Berkeley's Haas Graduate School of Business, University of Southern California's Lusk Center for Real Estate Development, and the University of Shopping Centers for the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). He serves on the Berkeley-based Satellite Affordable Housing Associates' board of directors as chair of the Housing Development Committee, is a founding member of the Oakland Retail Advisory Group, volunteers in ULI's Urban Plan program where he works with high school students in their senior year economics and civics curriculum, served as an ICSC officer for over a decade, and is now a member of ICSC's Alliance Program national steering committee.

Donny James

Largo, Maryland

James is chief real estate officer for the Revenue Authority of Prince George's County, Maryland. In this capacity, he works with the executive director to strategically identify real estate development opportunities that would spur economic growth, create "destination points," and produce positive impacts for Prince George's County. He also works with various sister agencies in addition to private developers to create public/private partnerships to assist with the execution of some of these projects.

He also works in tandem with the executive director to provide project status updates to the Revenue Authority's board of directors and county officials.

James joined the Revenue Authority with over 20 years of senior-level real estate development experience. Most recently, he worked with a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., where he served as the director of real estate development and was responsible for all the organization's real estate transactions. In this role, he managed the design and construction of a new \$28 million, 50,000-square-foot health care facility in Southeast Washington, D.C. He also managed the expansion of the organization's birthing center in Northwest Washington.

Previously, James served as the real estate director for the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation, where he led the planning efforts for the redevelopment of Poplar Point, a 110-acre development in Southeast Washington, D.C. As real estate director, he led the development efforts to relocate the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority to a new \$71 million headquarters.

James has served as a guest lecturer at Columbia University and has served on multiple panels regarding redevelopment in urban areas. He received his bachelor's in mathematics and economics from Morehouse College in Atlanta and his MS with a concentration in real estate development and finance from Columbia University. He is also a graduate of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

David Mulvihill

Washington, D.C.

Mulvihill is vice president, professional development, for the Urban Land Institute. ULI's education program delivers practical instruction for land use and real estate professionals at all levels from experienced practitioners and researchers in both online and in-person formats.

As vice president of this program, Mulvihill develops, directs, and manages professional development programs in a wide variety of subject areas, including the real estate

development process, real estate finance, public/private partnerships, and community and neighborhood design, as well as specialized programs such as pro forma modeling, construction management fundamentals, marketing, land development, and market analysis.

He also oversees ULI's recently created Real Estate Entrepreneurs Program. This new series of education programs is targeted specifically to smaller-scale independent, entrepreneurial real estate professionals and is intended to offer robust and interactive programming that more specifically addresses the educational needs of real estate professionals driving innovation and change at the neighborhood and community level.

He has also written articles for *Urban Land* magazine and has been a contributing author to several ULI publications and case studies. He is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University.

Ralph L. Núñez

Birmingham, Michigan

Núñez is a partner of DesignTeam Plus LLC, a multidiscipline consulting firm that offers architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, urban design, and land planning. He has more than 37 years of experience working effectively with clients on creative problem solving, development, and planning strategies.

Before starting DesignTeam, he was associate vice president and director of planning and landscape architecture for PRC Engineering, an international planning, design, and development company. His most significant project while in PRC's Houston office was the Enclave, a \$250 million office campus in west Houston.

He has more than 37 years' experience as a landscape architect and urban designer, with particular emphasis on project design, management, and development strategies. Projects include master plans and development plans for residential communities, senior living facilities, commercial and retail centers, office research campuses, and recreation facilities. He has been responsible for master

planning more than 210,000 acres, more than 100,000 dwelling units, 6.5 million square feet of office research, and 18 million square feet of commercial projects throughout the United States and internationally.

He has been qualified as an expert witness in landscape architecture, planning, and design. He is often called on to develop plans resolving difficult and stalled projects before they go to litigation.

He holds a bachelor of science degree in landscape architecture from Pennsylvania State University and a master of urban design from Lawrence Technological University (LTU), graduating *summa cum laude* from LTU's College of Architecture and Design. He has been a guest lecturer and has taught for more than 20 years as an adjunct professor in the College of Architecture and Design at LTU. He has participated in more than a dozen advisory design panels throughout the country for the Urban Land Institute.

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