

Senate Community Relations Committee meeting
11:00 – 1:30 p.m., Hazelwood YMCA
October 16, 2012

Attendees: Laurie Cohen, ULS, Co-Chair, CRC; Linda Hartman, HSLS; Lovie Jackson, Britteny Johnson, The Corner; Social Work; Gail Schwartz, CHS; Tara Sherry-Torres, OPDC; Trevor Smith, CHS; Tracy Soska, Social Work; John Wilds, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Community Relations, and Yiwei Zhang, OPDC Intern.

This was our first field trip of the year, and we went to Hazelwood to learn more about efforts to revitalize the community. We began our trip with a tour of the neighborhood, including the ALMONO site, the location of the former LTV steel mill. We met Sarah Stroney from the Regional Industrial Development Authority (RIDC), who told us about the plans for development there. It is currently a brownfield site, but RIDC has taken steps to remediate the landscape, and roads and buildings are being planned. The area will be a mixed-use development, and there is a master plan, based on a community engagement process that took place in 2010 and crafted by Rothschild Doyno Collaborative.

Some of the features of the plan include a job center, along with a light industrial zone, and housing below this level. There is currently a temporary bike trail which starts at the Hot Metal Bridge, which will be further developed. Roads will be built, and the original Second Avenue will be the new Main Street for trucks and other heavy vehicles. River Road will be built for pedestrian use and will connect the neighborhood grid to the riverfront. Fill has been collected for the last six years from other construction projects to even the grade of the site.

The plan includes a focus on minority-owned and female-owned businesses, with support for existing organizations and the establishment of partnerships. Best practices will be employed, along with an emphasis on environmental and sustainable storm water management. The design principles are economic, social, and physical. Economic considerations emphasize job creation, and reinvestment in industrial and manufacturing jobs. Social principles include attracting a diverse population, providing access to the river, and complementing existing groups and communities. The physical principle will focus on creating a unified but flexible vision and plan.

The redevelopment will include four districts: Riverview, Smart Site, Echo Tech Park, and Hazelwood Flats. There are 100 developable acres, and the goal is to create 3600 full-time jobs and 1300 residential units. Much of the financing is in place, and they are working with the City of Pittsburgh on TIFs.

After we finished our tour we went to the YMCA, where RIDC gave a powerpoint presentation on the ALMONO site, and we met with a number of community leaders and had lunch.

Leah Hardaway is the Executive Director of the Hazelwood YMCA, and she told us about the health needs of the community and how they are working to re-establish a sense of social responsibility and ownership with their clients. The Y offers a number of programs, including tutoring and recreational activities for kids ages 5-12, along with arts and crafts programs. There is also a lunch program, urban garden, volunteer activities, and a holiday party. The Y is working on establishing strong partnerships with the universities, and creating a safe and secure environment for young people. They also run a food pantry the 3rd Thursday of every month.

Kevin Boulding, District Vice President of the YMCA of Pittsburgh also met with us and talked about how each Y is different, and how the Hazelwood branch has improved its outreach to the community, which is a community of great needs.

Reverend Tim Smith, Director of the Center for Life, spoke next. His organization offers music and art, education, and athletics programs for teens in the community. Through his programs, after-school tutoring is offered in the library and fire hall, local kids play basketball at Minadeo School, and he helps kids get jobs. He established a music program called KRUNK, which stands for Kreating Realistic Urban New School Knowledge. Teenagers learn how to play music, form bands, play concerts, and raise the money to do all this from other jobs. One of his programs is called Building Together Pittsburgh, and in conjunction with Duquesne's Service-Learning Program, the teens fix up old houses. Another program is called Singing and Coping, a project with Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health which works with asthmatic kids.

Lina Dostilio is the Director of the Service Learning Office at Duquesne, and she gave us a handout about community building with a focus on education. They have been involved with community-based research and scholarship for many years. COPC has also been involved with the Hazelwood community for a long time.

Jim Richter is the Executive Director of the Hazelwood Initiative, and he told us about some of the predecessors to this group, including GASP, the Sierra Club, CHOC, and others. As a result of Act 2 remediation, efforts were made to increase home ownership in the area. The group collaborated with the URA, and COPC students have also worked in the neighborhood. Some of their projects include rehabbing houses to get them ready for re-sale, offering a safe Halloween party for local children, Light-Up Night in December, and a Stop the Violence event in October.

Sandra Cole spoke to us about her organization, called P.O.O.R.L.A.W., which works on issues of violence prevention, social justice, and efforts to bring the community back to what it used to be. They build relationships with parents, run a sister circle program, and offer a healthy start program to fight obesity.

Eric Stoller, Program Officer from the Heinz Endowments, spoke about their efforts to coordinate grants with other initiatives in the community, such as strategic investments, and building community in struggling areas. They help the neighborhood maximize the investments being made through transformational changes, and coordinate activities and participation with the local universities.

We had a great opportunity to network and talk with Hazelwood community partners over lunch, which provide for rich synergy and many opportunities for connections and follow-up, even among Hazelwood community organizations and Pitt and Duquesne.