

Preliminary Feb 2009

The following is a draft prepared by the Penn Hills Planning Department. It has yet to be adopted or approved by the Penn Hills Planning Commission and/or the Penn Hills Mayor and Council and is subject to change. Public comments and suggestions to the Penn Hills Planning Department are welcome.

Comprehensive Plan Code Enforcement

Every community needs a code enforcement department. Some gated communities get by with deed covenants and maintenance agreements, but even they need a committee for the occasional tough case. Residents in every type of home want to protect their investments and their property value. Here in Penn Hills the single family home is the tax base and the need to protect the value of the home and good code enforcement becomes an economic issue.

The Penn Hills Department of Code Enforcement currently has six employees, a Director, a Housing Coordinator/Inspector with some supervisory responsibilities, an Inspector/Crew Leader and three other Inspectors. They all report to the Penn Hills Manager. The Department is responsible for the issuance of building permits, occupancy permits, grading permits, street opening permits, and a variety of other minor permits. They provide inspection service for all of these permits. They also have duties for water meter readings, some sewer inspection work, low interest loan applications and inspections for loans under the Community Development Program. They are responsible for zoning complaints, junk cars, high grass, rubbish and debris, dumping, signs, and citizen complaints of a wide variety. They have their hands full.

The Director of Code Enforcement and the Inspectors develop and amend code enforcement priority lists on a daily basis. Some code issues are predetermined i.e. occupancy permit inspections are scheduled well in advance. Building permit inspection times are fairly well established. Court dates are set far in advance. But then the Department receives a phone call that someone is dumping over a hill, or there's a bad storm and everyone has a water problem that needs immediate attention. Or the



Manager promised someone that he would “get an inspector there right away”. The priority list has to be flexible, and of course, public safety takes a first place. An unsafe structure will take precedence over high grass, and a sewer tap in permit inspection will

trump a junk car. The danger occurs when the inspector drops the ball, loses the list, and fails to get back to a legitimate complaint. They need our help.

With the prompting of Management the Code Enforcement Department has made a general decision to be more proactive and not necessarily wait until a complaint is received. We expect this to lead to a somewhat higher level of violation notices and citations. As a matter of general principle a short list of priorities was recently developed by the Director of Code Enforcement. This list is a general reflection of common sense, placing a higher priority on safety and public health issues than on aesthetics.

Code Enforcement Priorities

As per Code Enf. Director Feb 2009

1. Unsafe and vacant structures
2. Junk cars on private property (Police handle junk cars on the street)
3. Construction or building without a building permit
4. Failure to obtain an occupancy permit
5. Unfenced or unsafe swimming pools

6. Rubbish and debris, garbage, dumps, etc.
7. Hi grass (over 10")
8. Shrubbery, vegetation maintenance
9. Accessory structure maintenance
10. Missing address numbers
11. Shrubbery causing driveway traffic visibility issues
12. boats and commercial vehicles not properly parked

This list provides some guidance to inspectors in regard to setting priorities. Complaints are still received and tracked.

Citizen Participation

During public session on the comprehensive plan the citizens of Penn Hills continuously ranked Code Enforcement as one of the most important functions of the community. They want to protect the value of their own homes by protecting the value of every home in Penn Hills. They want to set a property maintenance standard that everyone must meet

and they want the standard enforced. Demolition of unsafe structures ranked as the highest concern of responding residents.

Citizens from the Crescent Hills Civic Association have requested code enforcement contact information and monthly inspection for their neighborhood. Although their requests have yet to be honored Council has already responded with general requests to Management for stepped up code enforcement throughout Penn Hills. They are considering a new Vacant Property Ordinance and other new tools for code enforcement, and they have worked with Administration in resolving the issue of junk car removals. Council has heard the call code enforcement loud and clear. They are sensitive to the need and are open to new tools and methods for improvement.

Building Inspection

The issuance of building permits and inspection of new construction is an important part of Code Enforcement that often receives little public attention. While a restaurant is under construction down the street residents are often more concerned with the junk car in their neighborhood. Code Enforcement must manage both.



Many local building code issues have been recently resolved with the adoption of the statewide Uniform Construction Code (UCC). Penn Hills adopted this code in 2004 and has been enforcing the UCC routinely. The Penn Hills Department of Code Enforcement has committed to meeting training and education requirements for inspectors and we are proud to report that we have inspectors that have received various levels of experience. We have now developed “in-house” capabilities far beyond most Allegheny County municipalities. We have an inspector certified in both handicapped accessibility and commercial plan review and are capable of processing permit applications without outside help.

We have a Uniform Construction Code Board in place and ready to conduct hearings on appeals. The truth is that they have thus far held only one hearing on a permit matter. The matter of compliance with building codes has now become “routine” in a sense that contractors in Pennsylvania now have a uniform code, the code is reasonable, and the notion of meeting the code is expected by all parties. Public safety will not be compromised.

With the notion of improving and promoting quality code enforcement this Comprehensive Plan puts forth a series of position statements and objectives for Code Enforcement as follows:

Position Statements

1. The Department of Code Enforcement will change little from a structural point of view over the next several years. There may be enough interest to hire one additional inspector and there is room in the building to house an additional inspector. The Comprehensive Plan will recommend that we hire this additional inspector and community support for the additional expense will be important.
2. The State of Pennsylvania will continue to set minimum training standards for inspectors and provide opportunities for this training. The Municipality will want its inspectors to meet the minimum standards. The Department Director will request money for this training with the annual budget request and it is expected to be approved.
3. Citizens will continue to demand more and better code enforcement. As our housing ages and maintenance problems become visible citizens will push for forced maintenance. The citizens will direct their interests to Council, Council will direct the Manager, and pressure to intensify code enforcement activity will increase. The work load in the Department of Code Enforcement will increase. We must discover ways to increase the working capabilities and efficiency of Code Enforcement.



Objectives:

1. **Increase the enforcement capacity for Code Enforcement.**
 - a. Eliminate or minimize non-code enforcement work such as the need to read water meters and prepare sewer bill statements. This will increase time for enforcement of property maintenance codes.
 - b. Increase the participation of others in code enforcement activity. Have the police officers and city planners take a more active role when possible. The Planning Director, as the Chief Zoning Officer, and other planners have

related code enforcement duties and experience. Continue to use this resource, but additionally consider the systematic use of police officers for code enforcement activity.

- c. Train all inspectors on the use of available technology such as the GIS system and RealStats. Use this technology to streamline administrative actions.
 - d. Code Enforcement has only very recently obtained ORI equipment. They now have similar capabilities as the police in obtaining information to track ownership of abandoned vehicles. We hope to see more effective removal of abandoned vehicles in the community and more prosecution capabilities.
 - e. Increase the number of citations for routine violations and attempt to minimize time for compliance - Prepare and maintain computerized templates for code enforcement officers on standard violations such as junk cars, rubbish and debris, and high grass. Require that inspectors use these templates.
2. **Proactive Enforcement** – Move away from the complaint basis for code enforcement. Train inspectors to take proactive code enforcement measures. Take action immediately upon a visual identification of a violation. Continue to take complaints and react accordingly, but establish code enforcement priorities on a basis of importance and scope. Require that inspectors initiate reports on code violations throughout the community. Follow up by assigning reported code violations on a systematic basis.
 3. **Tracking Systems** – Continue to utilize Geopermit or another improved system to track code enforcement activities. Require inspectors to log all activity and equip inspectors with tools to communicate with other inspectors and coordinate investigations. Develop a program on tracking systems to trigger criminal and civil complaint filing.
 4. **Abatement** – Minimize the amount of time from the discovery of a violation to abatement. Move toward minimal amounts of notice. Amend ordinances when required to minimize required notice. File complaints in a timely manner. Provide Code Enforcement with the money and tools to carry out forced improvements such as grass cutting, clean up, and boarding.
 5. **Financing** – Provide a mechanism for code enforcement fines and the revenue from the collection of liens to return to the Code Enforcement budget. Although code enforcement should never be seen as a revenue source the return of revenue to the Code Enforcement operating budget can paint a clearer picture of the cost of Code Enforcement. Periodically examine ordinances to establish minimum fines for various offenses with the notion that minimum fines should cover administrative expenses.
 6. **Ordinance Updates** – From time to time every development ordinance needs to be updated. This process has become somewhat automatic with the national models such as the International Uniform Construction Code and Penn Hills will participate in this process by taking whatever action is necessary to adopt the updates. Some of our other local ordinances such as the Existing Structures Code need closer attention. They need general updates but they also need to be constantly improved due to enforcement issues encountered by inspectors.

One of the most recent examples is a case involving a broken window. This would seem to be a simple matter – the window is broken, fix it. The issue escalated, however, when a slum lord replaced window glass with particle board and defied the inspector.

In this case we had a landlord saying the repair was satisfactory, that the code was satisfied when the broken glass was replaced with the particle board. We propose that this is a symbol of something that is not acceptable to our community and if our current codes permit this type of repair we will amend the code. Moreover, we want to respond as a community and say that we will not accept sub-par maintenance practices.

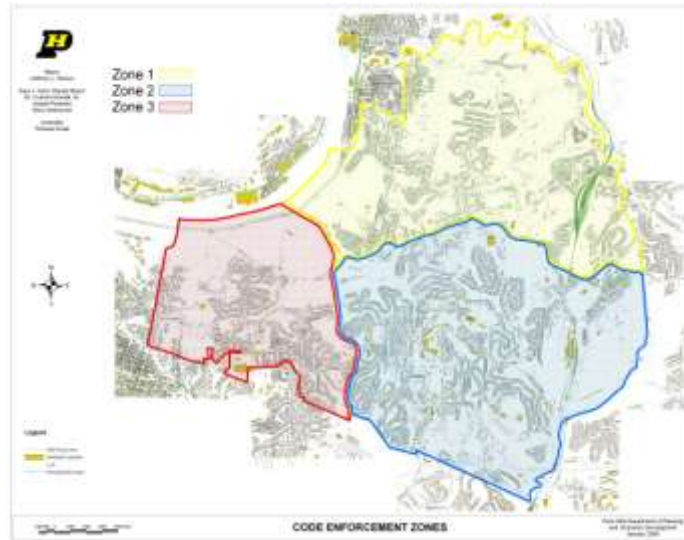


Some other areas where we are currently looking at code updates include:

- A. Authority – clarifying language under authority, allowing police officers, the Manager, and city planners to issue citations and assist Code Enforcement when appropriate.
- B. Grading – clarifying the circumstances that would trigger a need for a grading permit, and providing requirements for retaining walls, permits for retaining walls, and maintenance requirements for retaining walls.
- C. Temporary Structures – Definitions for utility trailers, temporary buildings and/or what constitutes a building. Providing provisions for not allowing inappropriate use of temporary storage trailers.
- D. Incorporating the storm water management ordinance into the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. Our current Stormwater Management Ordinance, Ordinance 2414, was developed independently from the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance. These ordinances need to be reviewed for consistency.
- E. Adding development standards into the Existing Structures Code rather than using references. For example, Section 301.12 of the ES Code refers to the Performance Standards of the Zoning Ordinance. This is broad and unclear during enforcement hearings and needs to be spelled out.
- F. Update the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance – Grading requirements, street design standards, open space dedication requirements, recording clauses.

7. Code Enforcement Districts – The Department of Code Enforcement recently adopted a district map that divides Penn Hills into three code enforcement districts. A

team of two inspectors is currently assigned to each district. It is the hope that this districting will help with communications and coordination. It will also be useful in terms of knowing what inspector or inspectors are most likely to be assigned to various complaints. This new district map took affect in February of 2009,



We are currently considering the creation or designation of additional code enforcement districts. These districts would be small sections of the community where code enforcement is considered to be a pressing issue or item of particular concern. These areas need not necessarily be the “worst” areas of our community or the “oldest” neighborhoods. They can be designated to support other activity such as a redevelopment program, other community activity, or pending new development. They can be neighborhoods or districts where we think code enforcement can have a greater impact.

A possible code enforcement district program would be as follows:

- A. Define the boundaries
- B. Assign a team - a code enforcement officer, a city planner, a public works representative, and a police officer.
- C. Survey the district, consideration should be given to inspect 100% of the exterior of the structures and the property in the district.
- D. Hold district meetings with owners and interested residents.
- E. Develop enforcement priorities and goals.
- F. Develop a loan interest financing program or other mechanisms for helping property owners in distress.

G. Systematically enforce maintenance code requirements, monitor progress, and report on accomplishments.

The theory is that with a concentrated effort code enforcement can have a tremendous visual affect on the community. Owners are brought into the process kicking and howling but the end result is dramatic. The success often depends upon how many other resources are combined with code enforcement – public works improvements, redevelopment loans, new development, etc. In previous years areas that have been considered for code enforcement include:

- A. The Hollows – The corridors extending from the intersection of Lime Hollow, Coal Hollow, Verona Road, and Sandy Creek Road. These areas have a significant number of problem properties, older commercial buildings, older homes, and blight. This area may be important in that it has a higher visual impact on the community as a whole since so many motorists travel these corridors on their way to other areas.



- B. Lincoln Park and Universal – The older neighborhoods in Penn Hills. They tend to have a greater number of older homes in various states of disrepair. They have a greater need for demolition funds, and tend to have a greater need for help with junk cars and litter control programs.



- C. Frankstown/Bon Aire/Laketon Heights – This area is sometimes thought of as an area in transition. Many homes are sold at very affordable rates and vacancy rates are not necessarily out of line, but property maintenance code issues are more prevalent. This could be a result of lower income families buying homes with limited capacity. A area such as this could

benefit more from systematic code enforcement than more wealthy neighborhoods.

- D. Rodi Road or Verona Road – Some feel that we should concentrate on our commercial corridors, Rodi and Verona Roads, where the greatest number of motorists come and go. Rodi Road in particular is considered to be the “gateway” to Penn Hills. If we want to sweep our front door mat and welcome people to our home perhaps we should start with Rodi Road.



There are some downsides to code enforcement districts. First of all we have limited staff time and the Director argues that it can take time away from a more important case, or it could delay our time to react to other legitimate complaints. There is the backlash of property owners who protest to administrators and Council that they are victims of selective enforcement and subject to standards not imposed on other residents or businesses. And supporters of code enforcement are sometimes let down with the reality of the limitations of code enforcement. In any event, we expect that the concept of Code Enforcement Districts will not move forward without a demand from citizen and continuing support from citizens who want this activity. We suggest that code enforcement districts will not be designated and programs will not be implemented without the support of residents, citizen advocacy groups, and eventually the Council and the Manager. We suggest that the Director of Code Enforcement will not engage in this process without demonstrated support from both the community and the administration.

Summary – Code Enforcement

The bottom line for Code Enforcement is that people want more of it. They also want to see quicker results. This plan recommends a stepped up code enforcement program and hopefully more activity in response to this demand. The reality, however, is that there are limitations to what code enforcement can accomplish. Code Enforcement works best in conjunction with capital improvement programs and community development programs. Citizens must also be willing to pay the cost of code enforcement, the salaries or more inspectors, the funding of abatement programs, and the cost of litigation. Residents must also be willing to step up and help their local government by talking to their neighbors directly, by showing a good example, and by helping when there is a genuine need.

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Housing

Penn Hills Comprehensive Plan 2009

Penn Hills is a great place to live. We have over 17,000 dwelling units in a variety of settings and in a wide range of price ranges. We have a healthy mix of single family homes, townhouses, garden apartments, and hi-rises. They provide shelter to a wide variety of families from all income and size categories. Penn Hills is predominantly a bedroom community of single family homes but we also have hi-rises for the elderly, public housing, group homes, and a millionaire's mansion.

Most of us (85%) live in a single family home of 5-7 rooms (71%) that was built between 1940 and 1970 (69%). Over 25% of us moved here before 1969, and over 70% before 1995. Our home is valued at between \$50,000 and \$150,000 (84%). Sixty Two percent of us have a mortgage, and we pay between \$700 and \$1500 per month. Over 70% of us pay less than 25% of our income for our housing. We represent the best of middle class America and we're proud of who we are.

Our homes are old and small by today's standards, but they are affordable and, for the most part, well maintained. Collectively they represent what we are all about – our homes are both our shelter and our tax base. For this reason we have concern at many levels. We need to keep our homes in good condition in order to maintain a sound tax base for the community. We need to maintain housing rehab programs to help low and moderate income families keep up with maintenance problems. We need to help senior homeowners to stay in their homes and to be safe. And we need a healthy mix of remodeling, additions, and new construction.



Over 50% of householders have resided in their current Penn Hills home for more than ten years which is a stable housing occupancy rate. But the average household income of \$69,100 is less than the County average of \$84,200. When the lower income is mixed with the older housing we get concerned. On the other hand when we compare our median family income to the median sales price of a home we are one of the most affordable housing markets in the country. The median mortgage in 2000 was \$879/month and the median rent for 2000 was \$559/month. This affordability continues to make Penn Hills an attractive place to live.

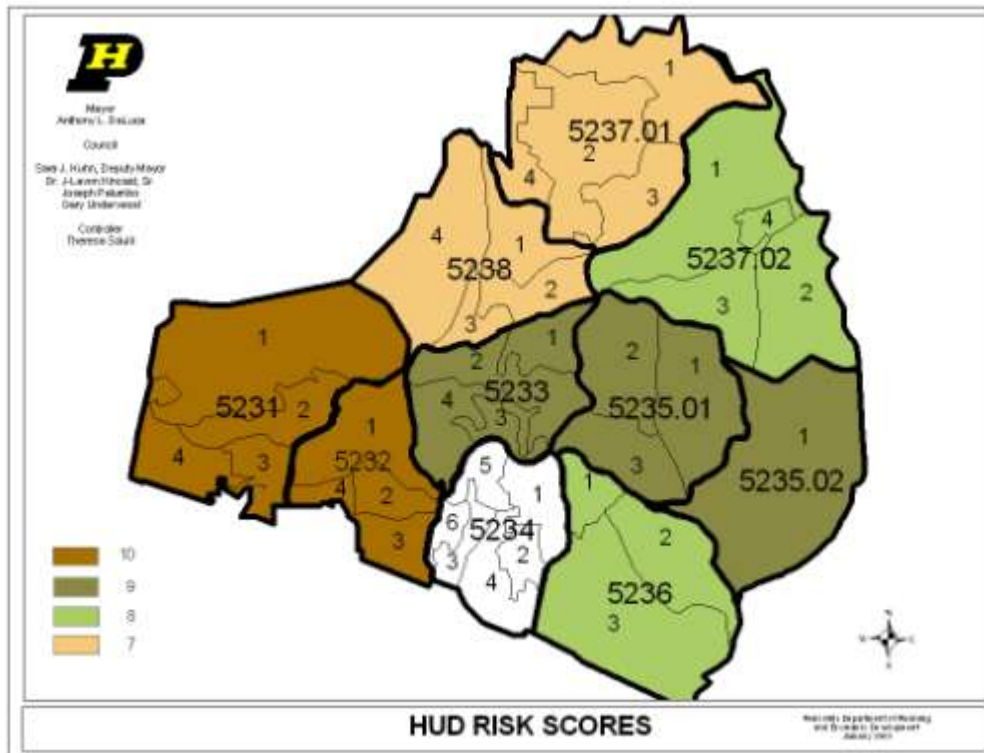
The Current Foreclosure Crisis

As we update this housing element of the Comprehensive Plan we are in the midst of a national mortgage foreclosure crisis. The affects are national in scope and potential

remedies are currently debated in Washington. Here in Allegheny County residents are somewhat relieved to find lower rates in foreclosure and, of course, continuing affordability. As we focus on Penn Hills, however, we find a need for serious concern.

Penn Hills has a tremendous need as a result of the recent housing crisis. We refer all readers to the Penn Hills Consolidated Plan for an analysis of our housing needs and we adopt by reference the Neighborhood Stabilization Program Substantial Amendment prepared by the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development. We propose to also adopt and conform to the Pennsylvania State Consolidated Plan Amendment 2004-08 Action Plan for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

The Municipality of Penn Hills is one of the hardest hit communities in Allegheny County. The following table and map illustrate the census block groups with the greatest need. HUD has required that activities be concentrated in block groups with risk scores of six or higher. We propose to concentrate NSP activities in block groups which all have a score of 7 or higher. Over 90% of our community qualifies and meets the threshold. Nine out of ten census tracts have risk scores over seven. Five of our ten census tracts have a score of nine or ten.



The County NSP Amendment further analyses areas of greatest need and clearly identifies Penn Hills as one of the areas with over 12% of its housing units undergoing foreclosure procedures.

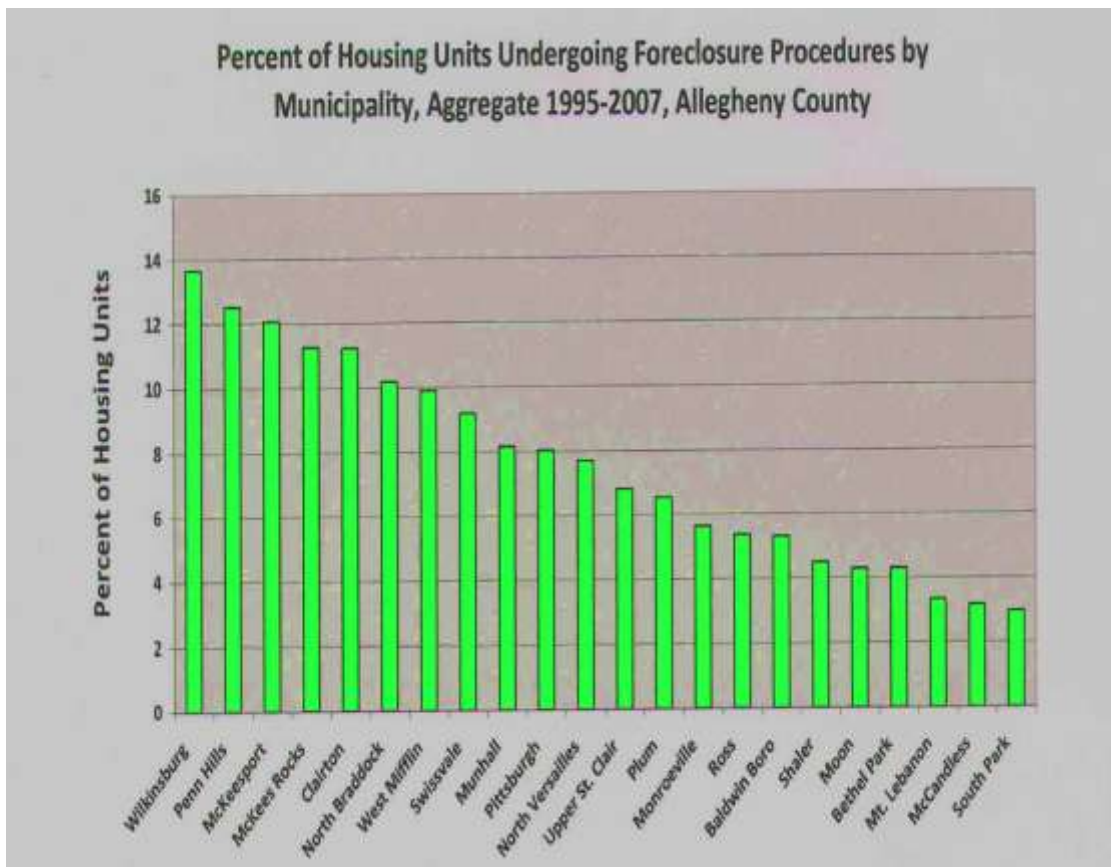


Table 1 : HUD Risk Score – NSP Qualifying Block Groups

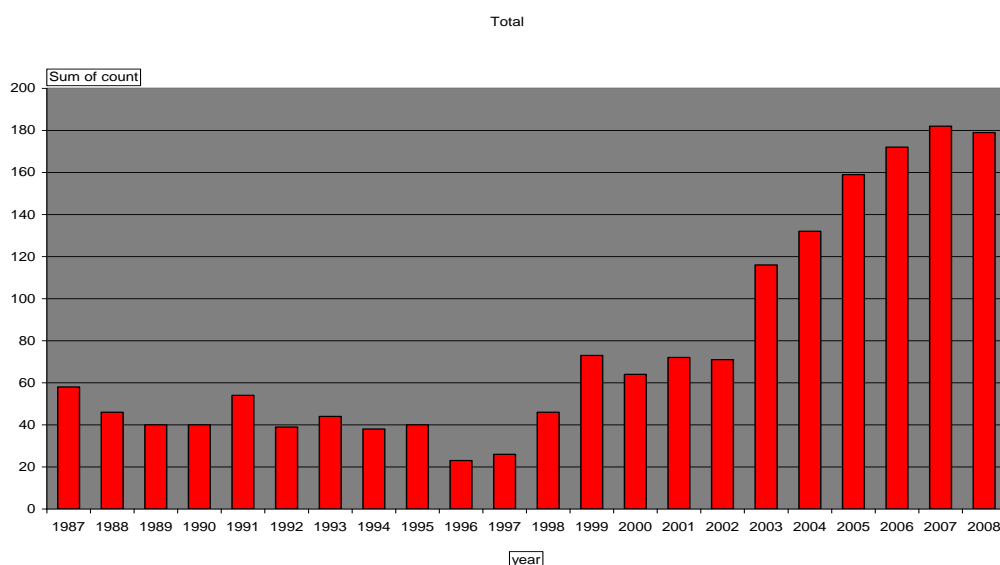
CENSUS TRACK	BLOCK GROUP	RISK SCORE	% BELOW 120% AMI	MIDDLE LOW MOD ELIGIBLE
5231	1	10	68.4	
5231	2	10	65.4	
5231	3	10	58.4	
5231	4	10	81.1	
5232	1	10	74.3	
5332	2	10	49.0	NO
5232	3	10	67.8	
5232	4	10	63.2	
5233	1	9	58.2	
5233	2	9	42.0	NO
5233	3	9	63.9	
5233	4	9	71.8	
5235 01	1	9	67.3	
5235	2	9	39.0	NO
5235	3	9	68.7	
5235 02	1	9	63.8	
5236	1	8	61.3	
5236	2	8	45.7	NO
5236	3	8	55.	
5237 02	1	8	73.2	
5237	2	8	52.0	
5237	3	8	66.0	
5237	4	8	52.6	
5237 01	1	7	55.4	
5237	2	7	62.1	
5237	3	7	45.3	
5237	4	7	68.8	
5238	1	7	55.5	
5238	2	7	59.8	
5238	3	7	73.8	
5238	4	7	47.8	

Foreclosures in Penn Hills

The data that Penn Hills has received from Real Stats on foreclosures in Penn Hills shows an upward trend on the number of foreclosures from 2003 to the present with the number of foreclosures in 2003 at 116 to 179 in 2008. The 2008 foreclosure data is for January 1 – November 28 and it is projected that this data will increase when December foreclosure data is incorporated into the chart. The chart below shows the number of foreclosures in Penn Hills from 1987 to the present.

year	Total
1987	58
1988	46
1989	40
1990	40
1991	54
1992	39
1993	44
1994	38
1995	40
1996	23
1997	26
1998	46
1999	73
2000	64
2001	72
2002	71
2003	116
2004	132
2005	159
2006	172
2007	182
2008	179
Grand Total	1714

Foreclosures In Penn Hills



According to HUD risk scores, Penn Hills is at a greater risk for foreclosures and abandonment than other areas in Allegheny County and Penn Hills has the second highest foreclosure rate in Allegheny County. All of Penn Hills census tracts are rated above 7 with 10 being the greatest risk for foreclosures and abandonment with 2/3 of the property owners in Penn Hills having a rating of 6 -7, 1/6 having a rating of 8-9 and 1/6 having a risk of 10. Allegheny County noted in their Neighborhood Stabilization Plan that 78% of all municipalities in the county had a least one or more census tracts with a risk of 5 or more, all census tracts in Penn Hills have a rating of 7 or more. Allegheny County Economic Development has determined that their Neighborhood Stabilization Plan target areas will be comprised of two areas of focus, priority areas and eligible areas. Priority areas are those areas with a foreclosure risk score of 8 or above and an eligible area with a foreclosure risk score of 5 – 7. Because of Penn Hills higher risk score, we will be focusing on properties in the census tracts with a score of 7, 8, 9 or 10. We have received a list of properties from Real Stats and will prioritize them according to census tract and risk score.

With this information the Municipality of Penn Hills Council has authorized an application for funding under the newly created Neighborhood Stabilization Program

(NSP) and we will seek newly developed resources as well to react to these problems. In the long run, just as all of America remains optimistic, we expect to work our way out of this problem and we will continue to seek ways to improve our housing stock.

New Housing

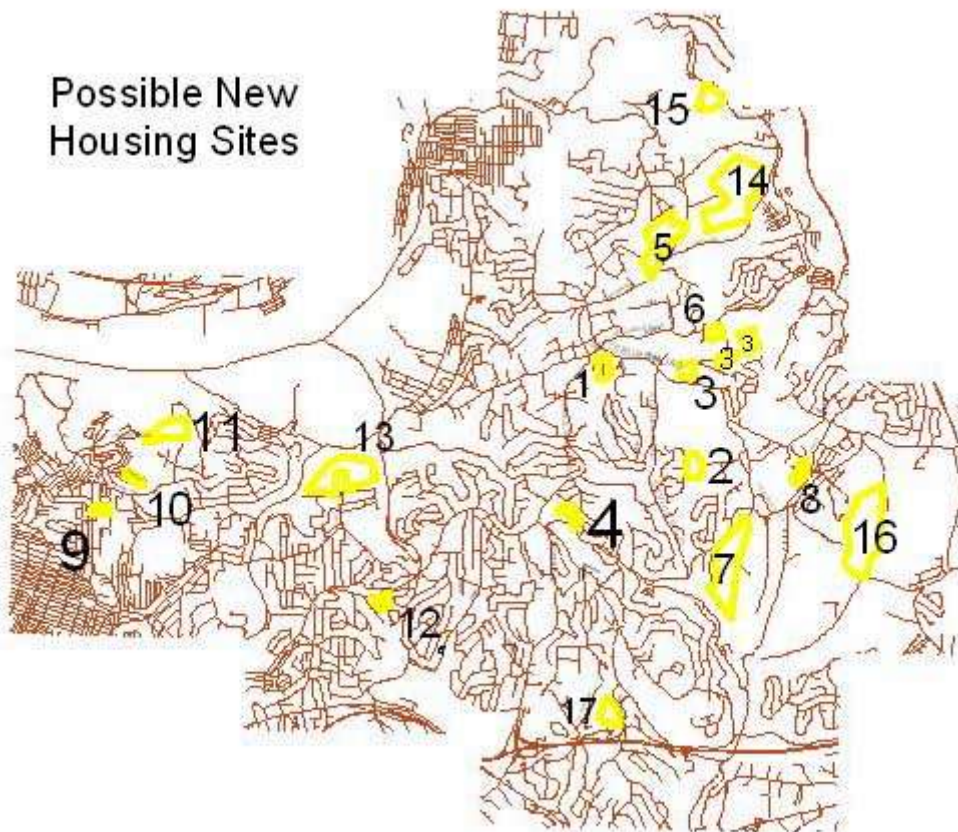
Some communities look upon new suburban housing as a negative, something to be avoided while leaning to redevelopment. Residents in Penn Hills generally look upon the construction of new housing as an asset to the community. They see new families, usually younger families, moving into the community and contributing to improved wealth and stability. Both County and local planners see new housing as a partner to redevelopment and rehabilitation and consider the development of new housing on infill sites to be an important part of quality development strategy.



We welcome quality new housing of all types. A healthy mix of single family homes, townhouses, and garden apartment buildings is encouraged. We will not, on the other hand, encourage an increase in the percentage of Section 8 and or other family subsidized rental units in Penn Hills. Penn Hills has been somewhat impacted by these numbers and more market housing is needed to provide a healthy mix.

We encourage developers to consider the development of homes in the \$250,000 category. Some families grown both in numbers and family income and seek to move from the \$80,000-\$100,000 home into something better. We currently have few opportunities for these families who want to remain in the Penn Hills community. Homes for sale in this income category are scarce yet we have some remaining vacant land that could accommodate this type of new development.

There are opportunities in Penn Hills to assemble quality new housing sites and these have been identified by the following map:



Each of these sites has its own positive and negative qualities but generally we feel they are some of our best opportunities for new housing. The Planning Department is prepared to distribute information on these sites, and any other properties of interest to potential developers. A quick summary of these sites is as follows:

Potential New Housing Sites

1. **Burla Inc.** – Near the old library, off of Aster Drive. At one time the owner (Paul Logratteria) wanted to develop the property himself. Zoned R5, low assessment.
2. **Ferdinand Palombo** – Off of Black Oak Drive or Hamilton, not the best access but a nice site. Zoned R1, good site for senior townhouses.
3. **Alcoma Apts LP** – This is the site known as Alcoma-On-The-Green, it presently has two garden apartment buildings on a very large site. There is room for many more units. Zoned R1 with a previously approved conditional use for multi-family.
4. **Pivrotto Property** – Off of Universal near #7 VFD. This is a tough site due to topography, but walking distance to the Senior Citizens Center and the Shopping Center. Zoned R1.

5. **Fisher Property** – A great site for new housing. 55 acres, low assessment. Zoned R1. Off of Hulton Road, near Indiana. Not inexpensive.
6. **Pampena Property** – Leechburg Road frontage. A good site for commercial but it may also work for housing. Zoned B2. Previously the owner has asked for \$500,000 for the property.
7. **Erekson Property** – Off of Universal and Thompson Run. This is part of a 200 acre parcel. Buildings are currently being demolished to prepare for redevelopment. Potential site for large development.
8. **Mt. Ararat Property** – The overwhelming majority of this site will be developed for a church, but the land to the north bounded by Main Street and the access road to Washinbgton School is not proposed as part of the church development. This is a potential site for new housing. Zoned R1.
9. **East Lemington Site** – This are is a potential site in Lincoln Park for new housing. It needs the support of local and county government in terms of packaging, subsidies, and code enforcement. Multiple owners. Zoned R2.
10. **Santiago Street Site** – The same as the East Lemington Site – a potential site for new housing in Lincoln Park, but one that depends on packaging multiple owners, code enforcement, and subsidies.
11. **KC Ventures** – Off of Lincoln Road near the Penn Hills Multi-Purpose Center. This property was previously approved for 60 units of senior housing but the developer was not funded. New attempts are likely.
12. **Chirieleison Property** – This is a nice home on 10 acres of land. The possibility of acquiring and developing this land has, to our knowledge, yet to be explored. This could be a site good for senior housing. Zoned R1.
13. **McCutcheon Proiperty** – This is a wonderful piece of property with access problems. It sits at the end of McCutcheon Lane, a narrow local street. Otherwise the large undeveloped property would make a nice new housing site. Zoned R1.
14. **Chilton Property** – This is a very large parcel with potential, but only on a large scale. The expense of assembling property and extending a sanitary sewer requires a large number of units. There has been some interest from developers. The Planning Department has designated this as the best site for new upscale single family homes. Zoned R1.
15. **N&G Partnership – Hulton Road site.** This is a site currently zoned for multi-family and next to two existing multi-family developments. It is somewhat remote from services and more suited to family garden apartment units. Zoned R5.
16. **Allegheny Specialty Property** – This is a very large parcel at the Plum Borough line currently zoned R5. It requires utility extension and therefore a large number of new units. The new Walmart development and new construction in the adjacent Plum Borough could stimulate interest. Low assessment.
17. **N&G Partnership – Jefferson Heights Rd. Site.** -This site has utility issues by not being served by sanitary sewers. It could be developed if a sewer extension to Lougeay Road would be feasible. The surrounding single family homes are currently on septic systems. Possible site for senior housing. Zoned R1.

Rehabilitation Programs

The Penn Hills Department of Planning and Economic Development currently offers two housing programs. We have a housing rehabilitation program that will provide up to \$15,000 for home improvements at either 0% or 6% interest depending upon family income. We have another program for low income senior citizens that will provide a grant of \$1000 for any item that corrects a code violation, increases safety, or otherwise helps the senior to continue to live independently. Neither of these programs provides a solution to our problems. The loan program is underfunded and the \$15,000 cap is too low. The \$1,000 grant is only a small offering for a greater need. Nonetheless Council is limited in budgeting to the federal resources that are available. Current resources are:

- The Penn Hills CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program
- The Penn Hills Senior Aide Program
- HOME
- NSP Program
- Private Lending Institutions

The HOME program is funded with federal money channeled through a housing consortium that includes Penn Hills, McKeesport, and Allegheny County. Penn Hills has thus far authorized these funds for both rehabilitation and new senior housing. We also participated in a regional project utilizing our HOME funds in the City of Pittsburgh adjacent to our boundary line and the Eastgate Shopping Center. The City's Telesis project improved the housing in the abutting East Hills neighborhood and set the stage for new commercial development at Eastgate. Current HOME policies were adopted by Council in 1999 and remain in affect. They emphasize the rehabilitation of existing multi-family housing and support for low income neighborhoods in need of redevelopment.



The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) is new in 2009. We are currently awaiting a response to our first application. We expect to receive federal funds for the acquisition and rehabilitation of homes that have been foreclosed. We will partner with the Allegheny County Economic Development, acquire homes from mortgage companies, remodel the homes, and offer them for sale to qualifying families. We know that additional program to meet the foreclosure crisis are being developed as this plan is underway. We expect to monitor the situation and apply for appropriate funding when it becomes available.

Housing Rehabilitation Loans



The Municipality of Penn Hills offers low interest home improvement loans to qualifying low and moderate income Penn Hills homeowners. Owners must singly provide proof of income and ownership. Our Housing Coordinator is ready to help you submit an application. Please call 412-798-2150 at the Penn Hills Department of Planning and Economic Development.

Borrow up to \$15,000

We also have small grants up to \$1,000 for qualifying senior citizens who have health and safety problems with their homes.

These programs are approved by the Penn Hills Mayor and Council through the Penn Hills Community Development Program. For more information call 412-798-2150.

Another way to rehab our homes and protect the tax base is through code enforcement programs. Penn Hills has a good occupancy permit program and a strong relationship with local realtors who know that this is an enforced ordinance. We also plan a stepped up property maintenance program and we have dedicate a whole section of this plan to Code Enforcement. Please read that section for more details.

We have already emphasized that a Penn Hills priority will be to keep the housing stock in good condition – that the single family home is our tax base. We need to seek ways to increase opportunities for home remodeling and expansion. Many of our homes are small compared to new housing in today’s market. We need to encourage families to expand their existing homes rather than seek to sell and relocate.

Fair Housing and Affordability

Penn Hills completed and submitted to HUD an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in May of 2008. The study was prepared by Urban Design Ventures in accordance with HUD requirements and regulations. The study, to no ones surprise, essentially gave Penn Hills a clean bill of health in regard to fair housing. A similar previous study reached a conclusion that Penn Hills had no impediments to fair housing. This study pointed out that we could make some improvements in handicapped accessibility and community awareness. It recommended that we strive to continue to maintain a supply of decent, safe, affordable housing targeted to low income households both renters and owners. This Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice study is available in the Penn Hills Planning Department for those interested in the details of the analysis. The recommendations are incorporated as part of this comprehensive plan.

In regard to affordability Penn Hills again stands as a shining example. In 2007 Money Magazine placed Penn Hills on the list as one of the top ten most affordable towns in the country. Brentwood and West Mifflin also made the list. With our median household income of \$54,022 and median home price of \$84,915 there seemed to be no reason why anyone with a steady job could not purchase a home. Affordable housing may be a nationwide issue but it is not a Penn Hills issue.



Our affordability may in fact give us pause and lead us to work in other areas. For example, we need to encourage developers to build homes of higher quality to create a market for higher income families. And we need to convince State and County officials that we have more than our share of low income housing and that we need to ask other communities to accept a fair share of low income housing.

Housing Policies:

Considering our bedroom community status and our affordability, what are our goals and objectives? What do we seek for improvements over the next 20 years and what do we need to do? We propose the following not necessarily in order of importance:

- 1. Encourage new housing construction in Lincoln Park with the use of HOME funds, NSP funds and/or other federal resources.** The housing in Lincoln Park is some of the oldest in Penn Hills. Sections of this community are also the highest concentrations of Afro-Americans and low income residents. Neighborhood based organizations have cried out for assistance and are asking government officials to develop programs for new housing in an effort to rejuvenate the neighborhood. They want affordable housing and they want new single family homes. The Planning Department is currently working with the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development on a possible pilot project. Sites have been identified and neighborhood meetings are complete. Over the years the Municipality has demolished many homes in Lincoln Park and thus new infill opportunities exist. If these properties are packaged and combined with programs to provide subsidies new housing might be possible. We propose to continue these efforts.
- 2. Encourage larger new homes on larger lots where appropriate. We feel there is a market for a more upscale home in Penn Hills for growing families who need to expand but want to stay in our community.** Families currently living in the \$80,000 home that are growing and becoming more successful are looking to move up to a larger and more attractive home in the \$200-250,000 range. There are currently limited choices for homes in Penn Hills in this price range. We propose to promote this type of new development whenever possible.
- 3. Step up code enforcement activity on a town-wide basis. Rigorously enforce the property maintenance codes. Rid the town of junk cars and debris.** Property maintenance is paramount in Penn Hills. The heart and soul of our tax base rests with the revenue we get from our homes. The value of a homeowner's investment may rise or fall with the maintenance policies of his/her neighbor. We need to protect our tax base and protect our investments as well as protect the health and safety of housing occupants. Code Enforcement must be provided with the necessary resources and the mandate to perform. This Comprehensive Plan has set aside a complete chapter on Code Enforcement and we refer the reader to that section for more information.
- 4. Continue to operate the community development low interest loan program. Expand, when possible, both the regular loan program the Senior**

Aide Program. For more than 25 years the Municipality has operated a low interest loan program with federal funding through the Community Development Program. More recently we expanded this program to include small grants to seniors to help them continue to remain in their homes and be safe. We recommend that these programs be continued and expanded to include help for the handicapped in rental units.



5. **Advertise and enforce the local ordinances against discrimination.** We direct the reader to our “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice” for details and much more information on fair housing. The Municipality takes pride in having a current fair housing ordinance in place and we stand ready to enforce all provisions of this ordinance. We are generally free of any major impediment to fair housing in Penn Hills and we plan to remain proactive in this area. We currently partially fund the Fair Housing Hotline in Allegheny County and we propose to continue this activity.

6. **Continue participation in County and regional efforts to combat homelessness.** The Municipality of Penn Hills collaborates with Allegheny County, the City of McKeesport and the City of Pittsburgh, homeless service providers, public housing authorities, health organizations, public safety and other organizations known as the Continuum of Care. The Allegheny County Department of Human Services, (DHS) is the lead agency that administers and monitors the programs that address the homeless population in Allegheny County. This system assists homeless individuals and families with the difficult task of transitioning from living on the streets to living independently in permanent housing. Services include housing placement, health care, employment programs and supportive counseling services. Grant funds for the homeless programs are available through the HUD, the PA Department of Public Welfare Homeless Assistance Program, (HAP) and the Emergency Shelter Grant program all administered by DHS.

DHS collects the data for Allegheny County on the number of homeless individuals and families. The information is currently available in a computerized database through the Homeless Information Management System, (HMIS). With this program providers are able to determine the number of homeless in Allegheny County. Generally when a Penn Hills individual or family becomes homeless, they leave Penn Hills and seek assistance from providers throughout Allegheny County. Data from 2003 reported that approximately 50 individuals whose last known address was in Penn Hills received assistance from homeless providers.

Allegheny County is in the process of implementing a ten year plan to end chronic homelessness. This process began in 2004 when a federal mandate was

adopted and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness advised all communities across the United States to implement a ten year plan to end chronic homelessness. The Homeless Advisory board was also recently formed to assist Allegheny County, the City of McKeesport, the City of Pittsburgh and Penn Hills in implementing and reviewing the many programs, policies and objectives in Allegheny County's plan to end homelessness by 2015. Penn Hills staff will continue to work closely with DHS throughout this process.

Additional information on homeless programs is available in the Penn Hills Planning Department. This information is also available at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Community Services or online at their website: <http://www.alleghenycounty.us.dhs/ocs.aspx>.

- 6. Support the efforts of group homes agencies as an effort to care for the physically and mentally handicapped. Rigorously abide by the federal fair housing laws.** Several years ago Penn Hills became the shining example of cooperation between government and agencies that cared for the mentally and physically handicapped. We drafted ordinances to facilitate approvals for group homes and we assisted these agencies in educating the residents of Penn Hills. Now today these ordinances are obsolete and we took the lead in enforcing the Federal Fair Housing Act. We plan to continue to support these agencies in their efforts and we plan to continue to abide by the Fair Housing Act.
- 7. Encourage HUD and the County to minimize new Section 8 housing in Penn Hills. It is our position that Penn Hills has a disproportionate share of Section 8 housing in Allegheny County and this population needs to be decentralized.** Currently, neither the Penn Hills Planning Department nor any other local government agency has authority on what housing units will come under the Section 8 program. Local governing body approvals are not necessary. It is clear, however, that Penn Hills has reached a point where we have more than our fair share of Section 8 units within the boundaries of Penn Hills and we want to develop new policies. We propose to lobby the County and Federal governments to develop policies that more fairly disburse the Section 8 population. It has become evident that a high concentration of Section 8 units in any one neighborhood brings with it the problems that are associated with poverty and unemployment. The same applies at the community level. We propose to ask that federal subsidies be designed to disburse the housing on a more equitable basis.
- 8. Promote the construction of new senior citizen housing in multiple locations in Penn Hills. Attempt to attract quality developers accustomed to working with HOME, PHFA, and tax incentive programs that finance this type of development.**



As our population ages the need for senior housing continues to grow. Every senior development in Penn Hills has a long waiting list and we have no reason to not expect the trend to continue. We have identified and mapped what we feel are the best possible sites in Penn Hills for this type of housing and we plan to encourage new development of this type.

Related Documents:

1. *The Penn Hills Five Year Consolidated Plan Action Plan and CDBG Program, Jan 10, 2005*
2. *The Penn Hills Analysis of Impediments To Fair Housing, 2008*
3. *Penn Hills Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report, May 2008*
4. *Penn Hills NSP Program, Jan 2009*