

Spring to Summer 2013

Contents

From the PHCA	2
News and Announcements	3
More News	4
Love Your Block	
Pivotal Streets grants	5
Green Spaces	
Fun in the Sun at West Penn Recreation Center	6
Fun in the Sun, continued	7
Fire Site Planning Update	8
Home energy assessment program	
Traffic calming recommendations	9
Traffic, continued	10
Working with our neighbors	
Membership Application	11
PHCA items for sale	

Long-awaited Spring Brings the Green (Projects)

by Valerie Testa

The longing for Spring sprouted along with my seedlings this February. Their growth in my basement under lights marked the passing of winter's last weeks. I had counted back the weeks from the average last frost date to begin the planning for the growing season ahead. Prior to gardening, I would sit around in February and whine for June. Gardening has changed that. I know that my hot peppers need to be started by February's end and tomatoes go in shortly thereafter. Once the cool weather crops like kale and peas go in the ground as seed, the excitement really starts to build. Gardening has helped me appreciate the time winter gives us to plan ahead.

We began tending two open green spaces last year. In June with the help of a City of Pittsburgh Love Your Block Grant, we revitalized the triangular-shaped lot at the corner of Brereton and Herron (feel free to pass me some name ideas for this parklett). In October, the PHCA teamed up with Tree Pittsburgh and the City of Pittsburgh's forestry department to do some urban forest restoration at the end of Melwood (again, I would love to come up with a name for the space). This acre or so parcel of land was once a tot lot. After twenty years of no activity, the trees and foliage that came in to reclaim the land are fast growing, short lived, and aggressive.

These two projects have the potential to help us reclaim and care for green spaces that have been overlooked for a number of years. A long-term goal is to establish biodiversity at the Melwood site, and a pleasant, open green space to admire on Brereton. The work toward this goal is going to be continuous. Watching the sites establish themselves will be something I'll look forward to year after year.

During the growing season last year, the lot at Brereton required watering of the newly planted perennials. This year they won't require as much, but weeding will still need to happen. We selected plants that grow well in our region, such as baby mountain laurels



One of the many projects from the Green Team: Flower planting at the corner of Brereton and Dobson streets in May 2012.

and rudbeckia flowers, to avoid any species that would require extra care. Right plant in the right place is important for any growing area. The extra time gained from selecting the proper perennials will be used to pull bindweed and other weeds prior to them going to seed. Eventually their pervasiveness will wane.

The same principles will need to be applied to the trees planted on lower Melwood. Right now, knotweed reigns supreme in that area. The city helped by cutting back invasive trees including silver maple and *Ailanthus altissima*, more commonly known as tree of heaven. In their place we planted pignut hickory, honey locust, black gum, hophornbeam, Osage orange, eastern white pine, and chestnut oak. Currently, all of these trees are budding out, which is great! The leaves will allow the trees to grow their root systems.

While this is happening, the knotweed will be growing their root systems as well. Over the past few years there has been continual work to dig out roots and cut the knotweed back to slow and weaken its growth. We will need to continue this in order to keep the knotweed roots from competing with the young trees' root systems. Eventually, the trees will be strong enough to hold their own and create a shade canopy that is inhospitable to knotweed's growth. While the initial shock of seeing already established trees being cut down is

From the PHCA

President's Message

There's nothing that gets me in the mood for gardening and spring projects as much as seeing the vibrant colors of daffodils, irises and tulips in bloom. I'm even more excited about spring this year, because I know that the neighborhood will be blooming with lots of renovation projects too.

The PHCA is extremely proud to be supporting seven residential facade renovation projects this spring and summer with over \$22,200 in matching grants in our Pivotal Streets Residential Facade Renovation Grant Program. The interest in the first year of the program far exceeded our expectations. We got an astonishing 37 applications over the course of the month-long application period.

With so many worthwhile and valuable projects, our independent review committee had some very challenging decisions to make. The PHCA is working with the URA to offer more grants this summer and hopes to fundraise to provide even more grant opportunities next year.

We appreciate all the pride and dedication that Polish Hill residents have towards their homes and look forward to seeing lots of improvements this summer.



Alexis Miller
President
PHCA Board of Directors

New logo, new look



You might have noticed something new on the front of this newsletter. The PHCA has been working with the design firm Imagebox on a new logo for the organization and a long-needed update for the PHCA website. The new logo, which debuted on the cover of the last issue of the Voice, is a mini-portrait of the neighborhood, including houses, the curve of the road leading up to the 28th Street Bridge, the domes of the church, and some City steps, all nestled among trees. We're very happy with it as it shows both the history and the new vitality of the neighborhood.

Planning to stop by our office?

The PHCA office is normally open five days a week, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. However, there are occasional times when we must be closed during those hours due to our one staff member attending zoning hearings or outside meetings. If you're planning a trip to see us, please be sure to call ahead (412.681.1950), just to make sure the office will be open. If you do stop by during normal hours and the office is closed, please understand our reasons for not being there, and we hope to see you again very soon.

Interested in volunteering?

Stop by the PHCA office or a community meeting and fill out a volunteer profile form. Tell us what skills you have to share!

Many thanks to our supporters

So many people help support the PHCA in ways both large and small. We couldn't do what we do without the help of all these supporters. Just over the last few months, we've had occasion to thank:

Julia Sinicki, for running a Redstone Candies fundraiser at Easter on behalf of the PHCA.

All the volunteers who helped shovel snow through the winter months. Particular thanks to Kenny Brush, who cleared Flavian Street after each snow.

Brian Seklecki, who made a donation for supplies for the community gardens.

Darlene Hennen, who stopped by our office to make a very kind donation. Janice Heagy, Deb Jozwiak, Jeannie Kowalecki, and the rest of the monument committee for their work to keep the monument area tidy and cheerful.

Mark Knobil, who took the PHCA truck for servicing — and paid the bill.

The donors who support the PHCA through the United Way of Allegheny County payroll contributions program.

The dozen volunteers who came out and picked up trash for the Earth Day neighborhood cleanup on April 20.

The five professionals — two architects, a structural engineer, and two contractors — who donated their time to act as an independent review committee for the Pivotal Streets Façade grant program.

The volunteers who helped plant flowers at West Penn Park.

And everyone who renewed their memberships for 2013 — thanks for your support!





News and Announcements



PHCA Yard Sale fundraiser to benefit the Polish Hill Arts Festival

Twice a year, the PHCA holds a fundraising yard sale to raise funds for producing the Polish Hill Arts Festival. The next yard sale will be on Saturday, June 1. Donations will be accepted at the PHCA office anytime after Tuesday, May 28.

We're looking for books, toys, games, kitchen and household items, tools, antiques and interesting old stuff, jewelry, small appliances (if they work), small furniture items, lamps, and more. There are some things we are not able to accept: clothing and shoes, Christmas and holiday decorations, upholstered furniture, television sets, or computer equipment, and broken or very dirty items. Call us at 412.681.1950 or email leslie@phcapgh.org to check about donating.

The Voice: now reaching all Polish Hill residents



Starting with the first issue of this year, this newsletter, The Polish Hill Voice, is now being mailed to all addresses in Polish Hill. Now that the PHCA has begun to implement community plan goals such as development projects, traffic issues, and other concerns, it was time to get the word out to all Polish Hill residents -- not just those who are PHCA members.

We're excited to be able to share neighborhood news and information with everyone in the neighborhood --

and those who live just outside its borders. PHCA Membership will still have its advantages. Members who live in Polish Hill can nominate board candidates and have a vote on neighborhood issues at community meetings. And all members get free admission at the Heinz History Center for themselves and up to three other people. Just mention that you belong to an organization that's a History Center affiliate, and show your PHCA membership card. Members also know they are showing support for an organization that's working to do good for the neighborhood.

And for members who don't live in Polish Hill, joining the PHCA is still the way to get the newsletter and keep up on what's going on. We're thankful for all of our members, those who live here, those who used to live here, and those who support Polish Hill.

Volunteer to help the Polish Hill Green Team maintain our open spaces!

This growing season will present a number of opportunities for you to help out with Polish Hill's open spaces.



There will be monthly knotweed/tree tending sessions at the lower Melwood lot that will take place the second Friday of every month from 6 until 8 p.m. Tools and gloves will be provided and we can meet up at the planting site. There are 25 trees there, and if five people lend a hand, it should go pretty smoothly. Watering will also need to be considered and a rain barrel system will be in place soon. If there isn't an inch of rain in any given week, each tree will need 2.5 gallons of water to thrive.



The lot at the corner of Brereton and Herron will require some weeding and watering. There are a couple of rain

barrels at that site already. Contact the PHCA if interested in volunteering there.



Please join us on June 15 to help tackle sanding, painting, and planting at the Dobson-Herron steps and the Harding-Herron steps. Meet us at the PHCA at 10:00 a.m. or join us on site.



Event Calendar May/June/July

May 28-31 | Yard sale donation drop-off days | 10:00 a.m. — 6:00 p.m. PHCA office, 3060 Brereton Street

June 1 | PHCA fundraising yard sale 11:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m. | PHCA office, 3060 Brereton St.

June 4 | Monthly Community Meeting 6:30 p.m. | West Penn Recreation Center (Senior Center, lower level)

June 22 | Immaculate Heart of Mary Church Flea Market 9:00 a.m. — 2:00 p.m. | Rosary Hall

July 10 | Council-to-Go with Councilman Patrick Dowd 7:00 p.m. | PHCA office 3060 Brereton St.

July 20 | Immaculate Heart of Mary Church festival 12:00 — 11:00 p.m. | At the intersection of Brereton and Dobson streets

July 21 | Polish Hill Arts Festival 12:00 — 9:00 p.m. | At the intersection of Brereton and Dobson Streets

(There will be no monthly community meeting in July or August.)

September 3 | Monthly Community Meeting 6:30 p.m. | West Penn Recreation Center (Senior Center, lower level)

More News and Announcements

SAPP Update



By Alexis Miller

The PHCA has been taking a much more active role in the development that is occurring here and along our northern border of Liberty Avenue. Between the Iron City Brewery site development plans, UHAUL's renovations to the Granger Building and Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre acquiring a neighboring lot for parking, that short stretch of Liberty Avenue has seen a lot of investment over the past year. We hope to be a positive influence on the current and future development there.

The zoning application by the Social Association of Pittsburgh Professionals (SAPP) for a zoning variance to open a private social club on the second floor of a large warehouse at Liberty Avenue and 32nd Street in Polish Hill is still pending. The goal of the PHCA is to find a compromise that will allow SAPP to open their club and operate a successful business while minimizing any negative impact on the neighborhoods bordering the site.

In response to the Jan. 10 meeting that the PHCA hosted with board members from SAPP and the article in the last issue of *The Voice*, residents from Polish Hill, Lawrenceville, the Strip District and Bloomfield have expressed a variety of concerns about parking, traffic, safety, noise, drugs, drunk driving and other potentially negative impacts that might result from the club.

After the PHCA opposed the zoning variance at the zoning hearing, SAPP hired an attorney to develop a summary of that hearing, and to present those findings and recommendations to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. In order to ensure safe operations at the club and protect the community from the possibility of the club opening without any limitation on activities or conditions that could be dangerous, the PHCA started working with an attorney to represent the community's interests.

At the time of press, the two attorneys were working on an agreement that would ask the Zoning Board of Adjustment to put conditions on SAPP's zoning variance in order to address concerns about safety, traffic, parking, noise and late hours of operation.

Polish Hill wins Neighborhood of the Year



At the Clean Pittsburgh Commission's Bob Awards ceremony in March, the PHCA Green team was presented with the award for Neighborhood of the Year. Present to accept were PHCA President Alexis Miller, Vice President Myra Falisz, Secretary and Green Team leader Valerie Testa, and board member Josiah Parkinson.

The CPC's mission is to work to improve the environmental quality of life of Pittsburgh residents through litter and illegal dumping prevention, clean-up and enforcement. The annual Bob Awards honor the 150 Clean Pittsburgh Stewards who represent the city's 90 neighborhoods. The Bob Awards are named for the late Mayor Bob O'Connor, who put achieving a less-littered city high on his administration's priorities. His wife, Judy, and son, Councilman Corey O'Connor, were on hand to present the awards.

Congratulations to the PHCA Green Team and to all the many volunteers whose hard work helped make this award possible.

The Love Your Block Program

by Valerie Testa

In March, the PHCA was awarded a Love Your Block grant to help improve two sets of our city steps. Love Your Block is a partnership of Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and The Home Depot Foundation to revitalize Pittsburgh, block by block.

We are striving to get improvements made to stairs that are crumbling and to repaint rusty multicolored railings. This grant enables us to improve areas in our neighborhood that are neglected or overlooked. The only other thing needed is you! See the sidebar to find out how you can volunteer.

Last year's grant and its effect can be seen at the corner of Brereton and Herron. A space that was once overgrown with weeds is on its way to becoming another valuable diverse green space in our community. These grants, and the volunteers that help make the event successful, have a lasting impact that I hope you will all be a part of!

Iron City Brewery Update

The Iron City Brewery Master Planning Steering Committee last met with the owner Collier Development and the architect DLA+ on March 14 to discuss revisions to the draft of the master plan. Steering committee members and other stakeholders and residents from the surrounding area continue to express their concern with plans to demolish certain buildings on the 16-building site.

The steering committee has a strong desire for the site to be an asset to the community, while preserving the historic nature and gritty, urban character of the site. Agreeing on a common vision for the site with the owner and architect continues to be a challenge. Next steps on the master planning process are unknown at this time, but the steering committee is still hopeful that we can work together to see positive change at this historic and important property.

An overwhelming response to the Polish Hill Pivotal Streets Façade Renovation Grant Program

By Alexis Miller and Leslie Clague

The PHCA was thrilled with the tremendous interest in the Polish Hill Pivotal Streets Façade Renovation Grant Program. After the grant was announced in late February, the PHCA received dozens of inquiries from property owners interested in taking advantage of the program. By the March 30 deadline, an astonishing 37 applications had come in. Seven projects were selected by the independent review committee for this year's Polish Hill Pivotal Streets Façade Renovation Grant Program, awarding \$22,200 in matching grant funding. The maximum grant amount was \$5,000, and most of the projects came in under that.

The Polish Hill Pivotal Streets Façade Renovation Grant Program, like many similar programs around the country, was designed to improve the face of the neighborhood, focusing on the main (pivotal) streets. The program was funded by grants from the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development and the PNC Foundation. The total pool of grant money for the program was \$22,200, an amount comparable to the funds raised for first-time programs in other larger Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

The decision on which projects would be awarded grants was made by a five-person independent review committee, which consisted of two architects, two developers and a structural engineer. In order to ensure the decisions were impartial, the PHCA staff and board members did not make the decisions and none of the committee members are residents of Polish Hill.

The review committee used the published program guidelines to help make their decision. The guidelines stated that priority would be given to owner-occupied properties and to properties within the core of the neighborhood -- Brereton, Dobson, and Herron. The committee reviewed all applications and considered the scale and impact the project would have on the property and the neighborhood. With so many deserving projects, the independent review committee faced some tough decisions. We thank them for their time and thoughtfulness in this process.



Examples of façade renovations from the Polish Hill Pivotal Streets Design Guide. (Drawings by Loysen + Kreuthmeir Architects.)

The PHCA is proud to announce the seven projects selected for this year's Polish Hill Pivotal Streets Façade Renovation Grant Program:

3202 Brereton Street – reopening of storefront window where opening was bricked in

3204 Brereton Street – window boxes, railing, door, gate, planters

3019 Brereton Street – soffit and fascia, trim around windows and door

3057 Brereton Street – windows, window trim, awning, railings, fence, sidewalk

328 Harmar Street – windows, repoint brick, canopies, door, lights

1027 Herron Avenue – trim, planters, fence, roof

3508 Melwood Avenue – retaining wall, stairway

For those who are looking for alternative funding sources and have not started their project yet, the Urban Redevelopment Authority has a new matching grant program. The Residential Façade Program is only available to residents in six Pittsburgh neighborhoods, including Polish Hill. The PHCA is currently working with the URA to review the remaining Pivotal Streets applications and help to determine which ones will be eligible for the new URA program. The PHCA will be in touch with Pivotal Streets applicants who are eligible as soon as we know the outcome. The program is available to other residents as well. This program has a limited pool of grant funds that will be shared with five other neighborhoods, so applications will be reviewed and

awards will be determined on a first come, first served basis.

The overwhelming response to this funding opportunity has demonstrated the need for assistance with upgrading properties in Polish Hill. The PHCA appreciates the neighborhood's interest in improving their property and will be working hard to secure funding to offer the Pivotal Streets Façade Renovation Grant Program again next year.

Green projects, continued from front page



Dozens of volunteers helped to rehabilitate the upper Brereton Street green space in July of last year. (photo by Leslie Clague)

jarring, the diversity that we strive to create will be a beautiful and beneficial replacement.

I am continually inspired by the number of volunteers and the hours they've spent preparing these sites. Getting the plants in, as well as out of, the earth takes work and time, which could not be completed without a group effort. We are lucky to live in a neighborhood with so much blank slate that can be cared for and transformed over time. Diverse plants attract diverse insects and birds, and all of us reap the benefits.

These are only two of several public open spaces that are tended in our neighborhood. Opportunities to lend a hand will be announced on our website and Blogski. Or, you can just ask! We are always open to any ideas or suggestions for our neighborhood's open spaces. Please, let us know your thoughts! I look forward to spending another summer here and working with everyone to maintain and create beautiful spaces.



Fun in the Summer at the West Penn Recreation Center

by Jane Pelczarski

I vaguely remember the old West Penn Recreation Center. I can recall the ladies working on some type of quilt for the purpose of raising funds for the center. There was an apartment on the top floor that the Webb family called home. Mr. John Webb was the director there for years. He had two daughters, Grace and Marian. Marian was my Aunt Rose's very best friend. When Marian married there was a great big celebration in the old center. My Aunt Sophie lived across the street from the recreation center so we could watch all the big doings from her front porch. In the summer I enjoyed visiting Aunt Sophie and sitting on her swing. Sometimes she'd make lemonade and then also she'd bring out homemade cookies. There is nothing more pleasant than sipping cold lemonade on a long hot summer evening.



In the last issue we brought you a reminiscence by Jane Pelczarski, who wrote a collection of essays about growing up in Polish Hill. Here is another of her pieces, about a place that's still serving the neighborhood.



Little Leaguer Ricky Garstka winds up and pitches at West Penn playground, 1949.

(Photos courtesy of Rick Garstka)



Enjoying the summer at the old West Penn pool. (Date unknown)

The first West Penn Pool opened in June 1930.

(Photos courtesy of Terry Doloughy)



boys. Sometimes only the fellows were allowed to swim and then sometimes only the girls. At different times there were hours when mixed groups were allowed in the pool. Mostly when the men were swimming, there would be water polo games.

In the evenings, families would come and just sit and watch those who were swimming. My Aunt Mary and Uncle George liked to go to West Penn in the evenings so Mom would let me go with them. I was never allowed in the evenings to go alone. It was fun to meet up with friends and to watch those that were really good swimmers. Later a set of swings was placed not far from the pool and one could swing and still watch the swimmers. So many of us have great memories of West Penn Recreation Center and its facilities.

At the bottom of 30th Street nearer to Brereton Avenue, there were two types of swings and a small wading pool for children. There were swings with sides on

them for the younger children, and larger swings for older youngsters. Moms would come here after supper with their children. During the day the place was not as busy as in the evenings. The swings were of such a make that somebody had to push them in order for them to swing. We were always asking somebody to push us from behind so that we could go higher and higher. There was also a set of jungle bars for anyone to climb and do tricks. I believe there were a few other things that one could play on, but I can't recall them. Behind a high fence separating the swings was the ball field with bleachers. There was also a pipe near to home plate from which very cold spring water flowed. On a very hot day it really quenched your thirst. Sometimes we girls would get our moms to pack little lunches and we'd come to the playground and spend many hours amusing ourselves.

Being out in the sun all day was not considered dangerous as it is today. We didn't even use any type of sunscreen lotion. By the time school would start in September we children would be lean

Even before the new building was erected alongside 30th Street (in 1939), there was a pool at West Penn. The pool had a very high fence surrounding it so you could only get into the pool by entering the dressing rooms. There were separate ones for the girls and the



The Immaculate Heart of Mary baseball team. (Date unknown)

The large building in the center background is the Lyceum, which closed in 1973, and was torn down three years later.

(PHCA Archive photo)



Above: Mothers and babies in the Baby Hall of the old West Penn Recreation Center, late 1930s. (Photo courtesy of Theresa Wojciak)

Left: A Little League team. (Date unknown) (Photo courtesy of Loretta Burek)

and very suntanned. Very seldom did we go on vacations. Some families would go away, but not that many. These were very simple but fun pleasures that adults as well as children indulged in during the warm weather. Our homes as yet did not have air-conditioning. Many times to escape the heat people went to the movies. The theaters did have these units to keep people cool. Sometimes it would be so cold in the theater that you would have to take along a sweater. Then when you came out you'd be hot again. So passed our summers.



Watching a game at West Penn field. (Date unknown)

(Photo courtesy of Loretta Burek)



As fire-damaged houses come down, a planning process takes shape

By Leslie Clague and Alexis Miller

In the last issue of the Voice, we reported on the beginning of the pre-development planning process for the future Fire Site development at Brereton and Dobson Streets. In February, two vacant houses on the site were demolished. The pre-development planning process will take the rest of this year, perhaps more.

The first meeting of the Fire Site Steering Committee took place on Jan. 15. At that meeting, the Design Center, who is funding this planning process, and the steering committee discussed the process for choosing a developer and architect team to work through the community-input and design process.



At the Fire Site Steering Committee meeting on April 9, the committee discussed the next steps in the planning process. The first step will be to hire a firm to produce a market analysis, which gathers data such as residential and commercial sale prices and rent levels, and local demand, and identifies the unique characteristics and needs of the neighborhood. The collected data is analyzed to present recommendations as to what sort of project will be a good fit for the neighborhood and financially viable for a developer.

After the market analysis is done, the process to select a developer-architect team will be under way. Finding the right pairing will help to assure a development that's a good fit for the neighborhood. Our overall vision, based on feedback from residents during the community planning process, is a mixed-use development with com-

mercial spaces at street level and moderately priced living spaces above. The site itself, situated on a steep slope and bounded by older buildings, also presents challenges. We'll need to find a team that has the vision and the ability to create something unique for this unusual site.



Two fire-damaged buildings on the site were demolished in February of this year. (Photos by Leslie Clague)

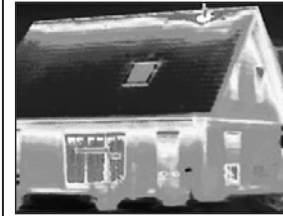
After a developer-architect team is selected and given the first option to purchase the property, there will be a kickoff meeting with the steering committee and the team to further examine the market analysis and start discussing what's possible. The architect will then develop a few concepts and those ideas will be presented at one or more community meetings to get feedback from residents.

Based on that feedback, the architect will select a plan to carry forward with further design. The PHCA hopes that residents will actively participate in this process, in order to help direct the design process and ensure that the community has as much of a voice as possible in what happens at this site. The final plan will be presented at a community meeting before the PHCA and Steering Committee decide whether to recommend the plan and developer to purchase and develop the property.

The owner of the property, Pittsburgh Housing Development Corporation, the Design Center, the PHCA and the Fire Site Steering Committee look forward to working together to create a unique asset for the neighborhood.

Free Home Energy Assessments

By Kevin Ketchman



A home energy assessment can identify areas of heat loss.

(Photo courtesy of NELC)

Did you know that about 25 percent of the energy used in the U.S. is used by households, or that most homes were built with no energy standards? Both are big factors in the amount of energy lost through inefficient home systems. Energy loss means money wasted, and that your home is less comfortable than it could be. There are things a homeowner can do to slow this energy loss, and the first step is a home energy assessment to locate your energy inefficiencies.

This summer the National Energy Leadership Corps (NELC) will be offering free home energy assessments to community members of Polish Hill and the surrounding neighborhoods. The NELC is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania State University, University of Pittsburgh and Penn State Center based in downtown Pittsburgh. A team of students will be performing the home energy assessments with the goal of educating homeowners about energy loss and energy retrofits within the home.

Over the past several months, the student assessors completed coursework at Pitt designed to train them on how to identify home energy losses, recommend the appropriate retrofits as a solution, and calculate cost savings for the homeowner. In addition to energy savings, the assessment also looks to improve health and safety of the homes.

If you have an interest in saving money on utility bills, improving health and safety within your home, or protecting the environment, then call or email to take the first step toward home energy savings. To find out more, call Cindy Hasenjager at 412.263.1754, or email cjh47@psu.edu. More information can also be found on this website: pittsburgh.center.psu.edu/program-areas/energy.

Traffic data analysis and recommendations from Zone 2 Traffic Division

By Leslie Clague

Speeding, cut-through traffic, and the quantity of vehicles on some streets are big issues for neighborhood residents. In particular, residents on Brereton, Herron, Melwood and Paulowna can relate many instances of property damage and even injuries due to the volume and speed of traffic. Based on input from residents, traffic calming (reducing the speed at which vehicles move through our streets) and traffic reduction are priority items in the Polish Hill Community Plan. It's an issue with many parts, which will require more than one solution.

The first option we investigated was to reduce speeds. Local officials informed us that speed limits are determined at state level. Speeds under 25 mph are only allowed for very particular hazards, but not for narrow roads such as Melwood Avenue, despite its history of traffic issues.

The next option, speed bumps, was our next line of inquiry. What we found out is that speed bumps, which are of a specific height and width, are not permitted in the City of Pittsburgh because city snow plows can't go over them. The City does permit speed humps, which are lower than speed bumps and do not present an obstacle to plows.

No matter what traffic calming options we might choose to request, it was clear that we'd need to have some solid data on the traffic situation to make our case. We asked Zone 2 Traffic Division to install radar boxes to record the amount of traffic and the speeds at which vehicles move through the neighborhood. To be effective, radar boxes must be placed along a straight, unobstructed stretch of road, limiting their use in Polish Hill. Zone 2 Traffic Division installed radar boxes at three locations: one in Polish Hill and two just outside the neighborhood.

The radar boxes were installed for a period of about two weeks each. At the community meeting earlier this year, Officers Cain and LeVan of Zone 2 Traffic Division presented their analysis of the data.



Rush hour cut-through traffic on Paulowna Street. During morning and evening rush hours, a steady stream of vehicles travel through Polish Hill on their way between Bigelow Boulevard and the Strip.

(Photo by Patrick Singleton)

The radar box that was installed in Polish Hill was placed on Dobson Street, a few doors east of Harmar Street, where it recorded 17,520 vehicles in a period of 13 days. 14.4 percent of the vehicles went more than 31 mph (that is, 6 mph over the limit) and 2.1 percent went more than 10 miles over the posted limit. Most of the traffic on Dobson passed through during the rush hours of 7:00 - 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Of the total of 17,520 vehicles on Dobson Street, there were many more -- 10,000 -- going east, from Brereton Street to Herron Avenue. The officers felt that this was due to cut-through traffic during rush hours. The 54D bus also travels on Dobson in just one direction, from Herron to Brereton, which would also account for some of the discrepancy.

By way of comparison, another radar box installed in late fall a few blocks south of Polish Hill, on Herron Avenue between Webster and Centre, recorded over 88,000 cars in a period of 13 days. 62 percent of the cars went 5 mph or more over the speed limit. 16 percent were 10 mph or more over the limit. Only 1.7 percent of drivers went faster than 40 mph, which might not sound like that many -- but 1.7 percent of 88,000 is 1,496 cars.

Earlier, in mid-summer, a radar box installed for 15 days on Melwood Avenue near Denver Street, just outside of Polish Hill, recorded use that clearly illustrates the problems along that route. The total number of cars recorded in those 15 days

was 11,750. A lot more cars went through from Melwood to Baum (8,815) than in the other direction. Officer Cain stated that the large discrepancy was due to rush hour cut-through traffic. Of the 8,815 vehicles traveling along Melwood to Baum, 72 percent of them were going at speeds between 26 - 40 mph (that's 1-15 mph over the speed limit). 2 percent (176 cars) went at speeds above 40 mph. In the other direction, going towards Polish Hill, 2,937 vehicles came through. 57 percent of them exceeded the speed limit by 1-15 mph; again, 2 percent (58 cars) were travelling 40 mph or higher.

The Traffic Division's analysis was that speeding wasn't actually the biggest problem. It was their conclusion that the volume of traffic is the more serious issue, because the narrow streets, such as Melwood, are not designed to handle this large amount of traffic. Their recommendation was to focus on reducing the number of vehicles that use Polish Hill as a cut-through during rush hours. The best way to do this, Officer Cain stated, was to make it inconvenient for cut-through drivers to use the Polish Hill short cut. He recommended that we request No Left Turn signs, which would be in effect only during rush hour. One suggested location was the Melwood - Herron Avenue intersection, so those driving up Herron could not turn left onto Melwood during the morning rush hour. Carefully selected locations and times could address the typical route of cut-through drivers, while presenting less of a problem for residents.

It was also proposed that there be a No Turn sign during rush hour on Bigelow at Finland, where drivers turn into the neighborhood at high speeds. This would help funnel cut-through drivers to Herron and keep them off one of the most narrow areas of Melwood. Residents at the meeting supported this suggestion.

The officers stated that once signs were in place, Traffic Division officers would be on hand for a few weeks to enforce the new limits. They acknowledged that things would be chaotic for a couple of weeks as drivers came through, were pulled over, and had to turn around.

Continued on page 10

Traffic recommendations, from page 9

Based on their experiences with this process in other neighborhoods, they assured residents that things would settle down within a month, as cut-through drivers realized that the Polish Hill shortcut was no longer a shortcut, and at that point we would see a reduction in traffic.

The next steps would be to discuss the question with the community, do an engineering study, and decide what course of action we wished to pursue. The Traffic Division officers warned us that although their recommendations were made based on data and on their experience in other neighborhoods, many residents would reject any suggestion that impacted convenience.

The residents present at the community meeting were cautiously supportive of No Left Turn signs. They disagreed, however, that the numbers of cars speeding were in an acceptable range. During a spirited discussion, it was pointed out that even if just 2 percent of all vehicles driving through Polish Hill were going more than 10 mph over the limit, that would be a few hundred cars every week -- too many opportunities for property damage or injuries. Residents felt that a multi-pronged approach would be the best way to slow and reduce traffic.

As the officers predicted, as soon as the recommendation about No Left Turn signs were made public, there was a flurry of furious responses from residents who didn't want their own convenience to be affected by any traffic calming initiatives. The discussion isn't over, and the PHCA will be seeking feedback from residents on which options they prefer. No solution is perfect, which raises a difficult question we as a community must answer: are we willing to give up some convenience to make our neighborhood safer for everyone?

URA home improvement loan products help homeowners rehabilitate or renovate their property.


www.ura.org

Working With Our Neighbors: Clean, Green Hill, Hill District Consensus Group, and the Zone 2 Public Safety Council

By Laura Zurowski

As a resident who lives on the border of Polish Hill and the Upper Hill, I made the decision to join both the PHCA and the Hill District Consensus Group. It made sense to me that I should stay informed about the issues and developments in both neighborhoods since what occurs in one is certain to influence the other. As someone who is committed to keeping our city landscape free of trash and ensuring that pedestrians can easily navigate sidewalks and city steps, I enjoy volunteering my time on PHCA clean-ups. Recently, I learned that my neighbors in the Upper Hill are also active in this area.

Clean, Green Hill

As many of you may already know, Polish Hill was named Neighborhood of the Year at the Clean Pittsburgh Commission's annual awards celebration. But did you know that Phyllis Jackson, organizer for Clean, Green Hill, was named Volunteer of the Year as well?

Clean, Green Hill organizes regular clean-ups throughout the Hill District neighborhoods. In April alone, volunteers were out picking up trash and illegally dumped items near the Carnegie Library on Centre Avenue, throughout Schenley Heights, and on Blessing Street. Trash has a way of blowing down hills; the more that gets collected further up, the better it is for those living below!

Polish Hill residents are welcome to attend Clean, Green Hill planning meetings and get involved. Lasting no more than one hour, interested volunteers and concerned residents meet the first Wednesday of every month at Hill House (1835 Centre Ave.) in Conference Room A.

Hill District Consensus Group

Joining the HDCG also has some excellent benefits beyond meeting neighbors

and motivated community leaders. Membership, at \$5 a year, is open to everyone regardless of neighborhood and allows you the opportunity to take advantage of workshops, lectures and entertainment offerings. Past HDCG events range from workshops on starting a business, how to purchase abandoned property, entrepreneurship for women, implementing effective environmental practices for wastewater, as well as jazz, dance and theater performances for kids and adults.

The HDCG meets on the second Friday of every month, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon at Hill House. You can also sign up for their monthly e-newsletter (membership not required) on their website.

Zone 2 Public Safety Council

Polish Hill is very fortunate to have low crime rates and much of that can be attributed to neighbors looking out for one another, staying alert, and not hesitating to make a 311 or 911 call. While monthly crime and safety reports are presented at PHCA meetings, a broader perspective can be obtained by participating in the monthly Zone 2 Public Safety Council meetings. Zone 2 covers the area from Downtown to Lawrenceville, and Oakland to the Strip District.

Being aware of crime trends happening in our surrounding neighborhoods is important to preventing them for occurring here. The Zone 2 Public Safety Council meeting takes place the fourth Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. with upcoming meetings on May 23 and June 27 at the Hill House. Law enforcement can work more effectively to solve and prevent crimes when neighborhoods and neighbors band together to report suspicious or criminal behavior.

For more info on these groups visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/CleanGreenHill>

<https://www.facebook.com/HillDistrictConsensusGroup>

<http://www.hdcg.org>

<http://pittsburghpa.gov/police/zone2>



Polish Hill Civic Association Membership Application

Membership term is by calendar year — all memberships expire at the end of each year.
Just \$5 makes you a PHCA member through December 2013!

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

NAME: _____

(Street Address) _____

(City) _____ (State) _____ (ZIP) _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

I'm not currently subscribed to the PHCA e-blast which comes out every other week — sign me up!

REGULAR MEMBER _____(Polish Hill residents)	~ Or ~	SUBSCRIPTION MEMBER _____(Non-residents)
____New Member	~ Or ~	____Renewal

For office use only:

REC'D BY: _____ DATE: _____ GOT CARD _____ LOGGED _____

Make checks payable to the Polish Hill Civic Association and mail with this application to:
Polish Hill Civic Association, Membership Chair, 3060 Brereton Street, Pittsburgh PA 15219

Benefits of membership



Free courtesy admission to the Heinz History Center for yourself and up to three others
(Show your PHCA membership card at the front desk)



Members who are also Polish Hill residents may vote to elect PHCA board members



Knowing that you're supporting an organization that is working to make Polish Hill a better place to live!

Polish Hill items benefit the PHCA—order here!



Polish Hill t-shirt
The crowned eagle on a red or black shirt, in adult or youth sizes.

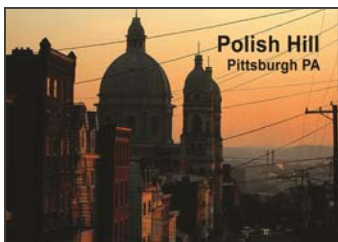
Short sleeve \$15.00
Long sleeve \$20.00



Pierogi pins and ornaments \$5
Handmade from felt



Button .50 ea.
Crowned eagle on a red background, 1½" diameter



Postcard .50 ea.
A colorful sunset view of Brereton Street by Mark Knobil

Item	Qty	Cost	Total
Red t-shirt Circle size(s) desired Youth S M Adults S M L XL XXL		Short sleeve 15.00 Long sleeve 20.00	
Black t-shirt Circle size(s) desired Youth S M Adults S M L XL XXL		Short sleeve 15.00 Long sleeve 20.00	
Polish Hill button		.50 ea.	
Pierogi pin		5.00 ea.	
Pierogi ornament		5.00 ea.	
Postcard		.50 ea.	
Postage			5.00
TOTAL			

Make your check out to the Polish Hill Civic Association .

Ship to:

Name	
Address	
Phone, email	

POLISH HILL VOICE

3060 Brereton Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone: 412-681-1950
Email: phca@phcapgh.org
Website: www.phcapgh.org
Blog: blogski.phcapgh.org

Contributors:

Leslie Clague
Kevin Ketchman
Alexis Miller
Jane Pelczarski
Valerie Testa
Laura Zurowski

Photos contributed by:

Loretta Burek
Leslie Clague
Terry Doloughy
Rick Garstka
Patrick Singleton
Theresa Wojciak
and the PHCA Archive

Copy Editing

Josiah Parkinson
Laura Zurowski

Editorial Advisor

Myra Falisz

Editor and layout

Leslie Clague

The PHCA's mission is to respect and preserve the sense of community in Polish Hill while promoting economic and housing development opportunities, and improving the quality of life for our community.

Upcoming Community Meetings:

June 4

(There will be no community meetings in July or August)

September 3

All residents of are welcome at community meetings!

Meetings are held at 6:30 p.m.

**in the Senior Center on the lower level of the West Penn Recreation Center,
450 30th Street at Paulowna Street.**



United Way of
Allegheny County

The United Way of Allegheny County has a payroll deduction campaign for donations to your favorite local organizations. Please consider supporting the Polish Hill Civic Association — our organization number is 258.