



# Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh

## Give Life to History.®

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December 28, 2006

Glenda Murphy  
Public Participation Manager  
Olszak Management Consulting, Inc.  
Regional Enterprise Tower  
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 350  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Ms. Murphy:

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh (YPA) welcomes this opportunity to provide our input in advance of the completion of the Allegheny County Comprehensive Plan.

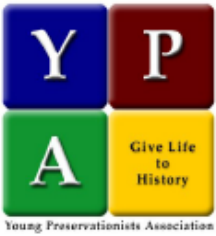
Since our founding in 2002, we have encouraged young people to discover, and rediscover, their history in the nine-county southwestern Pennsylvania region. Although our focus is regional, we have concentrated our efforts on Allegheny County, which has the largest concentration of historic sites in the nine-county area. YPA therefore believes that these sites should be given top priority when preparing the Comprehensive Plan.

In addition, we want to focus attention on other historic sites that may not be listed on the National Register or designated a National Historic Landmark. These include those historic sites which we have called attention to through our two publications, "Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area" and "New Frontiers in Preservation." We also want to emphasize sites associated with the Pennsylvania Main Street and Elm Street programs, African American historic sites, and farmland and open space.

### National Register Properties

According to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), which oversees the National Register program, there are 450 sites listed or eligible for listing on the National Register in Allegheny County, including eight National Historic Landmarks (which includes the newly added Carrie Furnaces in Rankin).

From the Carnegie Free Library of Braddock to the Library-Stevenson Plan Historic District in McKeesport to the John F. Singer House in Wilkinsburg, Properties eligible for listing and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as National Historic Landmarks, should be given top priority by Allegheny County when considering land use planning, including transportation corridors, new housing, and business development. A list of National Register and National Historic Landmark properties are attached.



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### **“Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area”**

In 2003, YPA pioneered a list of historic preservation investment and development opportunities called the “Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area” (in contrast to an “Endangered Sites” list). Since that time, we have published four annual lists. In the 40 sites which have been on the list, ten are located in Allegheny County (exclusive of Pittsburgh). YPA’s latest “Top Ten List” is included with this letter.

YPA’s Top Ten Sites in Allegheny County, 2003-2006, include:

- Eagles Club No. 285/Hitzrot House, 626 Market Street, City of McKeesport (YPA’s Top Ten List in 2006)
- First Presbyterian Church, 416 Library Street, Braddock Borough (2006)
- Mooncrest Community, Moon Township (2006)
- Braddock Avenue Historic District, Braddock Borough (2005)
- Bryce-Mesta Mansion, 540 Doyle Avenue, West Homestead Borough (2005)
- Historic Theaters: Cinema 4 Theater, 3075 West Liberty Avenue, and the Hollywood Theater, 1447 Potomac Avenue, both in Dormont Borough, and the Denis Theater, 685 Washington Road, in Mt. Lebanon Borough (2005)
- Pennsylvania Station, Hay Street at Ross Avenue, Wilkinsburg Borough (2004)
- Eighth Avenue National Register District, Homestead Borough (2003)

Through this list, YPA encourages investment and redevelopment of these sites that respect their historic character and context. In the case of the Braddock Avenue Historic District (which was de-listed from the National Register by the PHMC) and the Eighth Avenue National Register Historic District in Homestead, YPA encourages a holistic approach to reinvestment, including new structures that are compatible with the surrounding historic structures. The replacement of the former Chiodo’s Bar along Homestead’s Eighth Avenue with a Walgreen’s is not a good example of infill new construction. On the other hand, the restoration of the Bost Building, a National Historic Landmark at the other end of Homestead’s Eighth Avenue District, is an ideal model for how historic properties should be treated.

YPA is particularly concerned with the Borough of Braddock for two reasons: first, because so many historic structures are targeted by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission for the (once) proposed Mon-Fayette Expressway, extreme sensitivity must be given to the impact that this road (if it ever gets built) will have on adjacent, existing structures, such as the Braddock Carnegie Library and First Presbyterian Church.

The second reason is Braddock’s role as a gateway to the Carrie Furnace National Historic Landmark site, which has been targeted for preservation and redevelopment by Allegheny County. Braddock is the adjacent borough, and the loss of so many historic structures, either through careless redevelopment or demolition, would strike a blow to the context of the Carrie Furnace site. On the other hand, a restored and revitalized Braddock business district would boost the heritage tourism value of both Braddock and the Carrie Furnaces.

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Although the PHMC has removed the National Register designation for this district (a move which YPA opposed), YPA encourages Allegheny County to use extreme sensitivity when revitalizing this area.

## “New Frontiers in Preservation”

In 2004, YPA embarked on a region-wide project to identify historic preservation priorities for all nine counties within southwestern Pennsylvania and the City of Pittsburgh. Funded by the Sprout Fund, the project, entitled “New Frontiers in Preservation,” identified ten major priorities for each county, including Allegheny. Focus group meetings were held with community leaders and the general public to develop a consensus about what historic sites (or themes) should be given the greatest attention. The “New Frontiers in Preservation” report is included with this letter.

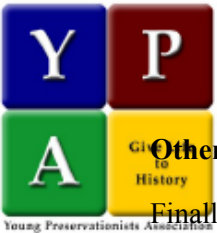
Allegheny County’s focus group meeting for the New Frontiers project was held in Braddock on September 20, 2004. At the meeting, a presentation of Allegheny County’s Comprehensive Plan was given by Marilyn Gelzheiser of Allegheny County Economic Development that outlined the Comprehensive Plan as a general policy guide for development, conservation, and economic initiatives in the county. A number of priorities were identified and scored by the participants, and each was given priority weights. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Top Ten Preservation Priorities for Allegheny County included the following:

1. Preservation of Pittsburgh’s Steel Heritage, particularly the Carrie Furnace site in Rankin
2. Main Street Revitalization, including, but not limited to, the following communities:
  - Homestead’s East Eighth Avenue
  - Main Street Braddock
  - Tarentum
  - Bellevue
  - West View
  - Coraopolis
  - Carnegie
3. Housing Development (affordability and accessibility)
4. Green space Protection / Scenic Byways
5. Crestas Terrace in North Versailles
6. Brownfield Redevelopment
7. Preservation and Reuse of Rail Transportation (Monongahela and Allegheny Valleys)
8. Dixmont Hospital in Kilbuck
9. Ethnic Religious Properties
10. Pennsylvania Train Station, Wilkinsburg

Of particular interest is the attention given to the Main Street approach as an effective tool for community revitalization. A number of communities would be eligible for the program, or in the case of Carnegie, are already participating. In spite of the removal of the National Register designation, Braddock would be an ideal candidate for the Main Street approach.

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### Other Historic Sites

Finally, YPA would like to call attention to additional historic sites that may not be included in the list of National Register properties or in YPA's Top Ten and New Frontiers publications: African American historic sites and farmland and open space.

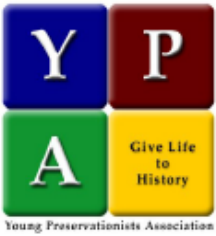
In 2007, YPA will embark on a project to develop an African American history tour guide for southwestern Pennsylvania. As the Allegheny County Comp. Plan's demographic analysis notes, 75% of Allegheny County's African Americans live in just four municipalities. However, sites related to African American history are scattered throughout the county. YPA will pass along a complete list of historic sites when our project is complete in 2008.

Preservation of farmland and open space in Allegheny County must become a priority for the county. According to the Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Preservation, Pennsylvania's farmland preservation program was created in 1989 and has protected more acres than any other state Purchase of Agricultural Easement Program. In 2002, the American Farmland Trust presented Pennsylvania with a national achievement award.

However, according to the USDA & U.S. Censuses Bureau, while Pennsylvania preserved an average of 64 acres per day in 2002, the state lost 300 acres of farmland to development. Moreover, more than 1,800 farms are awaiting approval for farmland preservation easements. Without new funding, program efforts will diminish. YPA encourages Allegheny County to devote significant resources to not only deal with the backlog of easement approvals, but to be proactive in identifying farmland and open space for preservation. We must not let southwestern Pennsylvania become, to paraphrase Brookings Institution scholar Bruce Katz, the worst region in the United States for sprawl.

In sum, YPA encourages Allegheny County to take into consideration its vast inventory of historic sites when considering land-use policy, road and infrastructure construction, business and industrial site location, and new housing development. YPA urges Allegheny County to "fix it first" and reinvest in its historic towns and sites rather than build new infrastructure that we cannot maintain.

To YPA, Allegheny County's history is our number one competitive advantage when trying to attract and retain young people. Ultimately, our young people are our future, and the degree to which we invest in them is the degree to which we build a more competitive region. History provides Allegheny County with that competitive edge.



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Thank you for this opportunity to provide our input into the development of Allegheny County's Comprehensive Plan. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dan Holland  
Chair  
Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh

Copy: Marilyn Gelzhiser, Manager, Planning Division, Allegheny County Department of Economic Development

Enclosures