

July 14, 2003

James L. Kennedy
Chairman
Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2500
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-1852

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh (YPA) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Formed in 2002, the YPA is a broad-based regional coalition of dynamic preservation leaders organized to ignite a new historic preservation movement in southwestern Pennsylvania. We encourage preservationists of all ages to get engaged in civic affairs that affects their communities. The YPA believes that history serves as an important guide to motivate and inspire us, and to be a model for how to create good new communities. We must learn the lessons of the past to create a better future, particularly for our young people.

General Comments about the SPC's Transportation and Development Plan

The SPC's long-range Transportation and Development Plan, while comprehensive in its intent, raises some important questions about how it addresses—or fails to address—the preservation and reuse of historic resources and, more importantly, how the SPC solicits public comment. The YPA's comments are consistent with smart growth principles that emphasize sound land-use patterns that encourage the development of older, historic communities. This type of development creates jobs, affordable housing opportunities, and provides a greater array of transportation choices, particularly for low-income families who often have few.

The Young Preservationists agree with the SPC's Economic Development Committee findings that “economic development projects are not regionally prioritized and planned.” (Chapter 3, p. 2.) It is vital to develop a coordinated and comprehensive economic development vision for the Pittsburgh region. However, this vision must take into consideration the diversity of the region, including low- and moderate-income individuals, minorities, and people with disabilities, as well as the diverse regional assets, such as the Pittsburgh region's history, parks, and cultural assets.

In general, the YPA urges the SPC to adopt ten “Smart Growth Principles” when developing the “integration of transportation with development priorities” as called for in

the SPC's Chapter 3, page 3. These ten Smart Growth Principles, developed by the Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County, serve as an important guide when considering new and existing development in the Pittsburgh region.

These principles include the following:

1. Mix land uses;
2. Take advantage of compact building design;
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
4. Create walkable neighborhoods;
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas;
7. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities;
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices;
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective; and
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in developer decisions.

The YPA encourages the SPC to not only adopt these ten Smart Growth Principles, but codify them into the Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania and into practice.

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh's Specific Comments

The Young Preservationists Association is encouraged with the SPC's Quality of Life and Community Development Vision for Southwestern Pennsylvania outlined in Chapter 2 of the Transportation and Development Plan. On the surface, these goals and objectives appear to support the Smart Growth Principles. Unfortunately, regional development in the Pittsburgh area has operated counter to this vision.

For instance, the decision to locate the Post-Gazette Pavillion (formerly, Starlake Ampitheater) outside the county discourages urban investment by taking people away from the city and away from established infrastructure. These types of development decisions do not make for good economic development policy and are in direct conflict with the SPC's Goal 6, Objective c) "Improve multi-modal access to the region's cultural, heritage, historic, recreational and entertainment sites." (Chapter 2, p. 6.) At Post-Gazette Pavillion, there are no multi-modal options. Furthermore, with alcohol served at the Pavillion, the suburban location actually *encourages* people to drink and drive.

These types of decisions are not pedestrian-friendly, provide no transportation options, and put a further strain on the Pittsburgh region's air, water, and soil quality, as well as diminish the region's quality of life.

In another example, we learned that a particular financial incentive was being offered to a certain real estate agent to *not* attract the outdoor retailer R.E.I. to East Liberty, adjacent to the new Whole Foods store. These types of policies run counter to smart growth economic development objectives and counter to common sense. The East Liberty Whole Foods is the company's most profitable store, in terms of sales-per-square-foot. With the addition of an R.E.I. store, it would have encouraged additional retail, housing, and other amenities to locate in East Liberty and given a much-needed economic boost to a neighborhood in need of private investment. But with developer and real estate incentives that *discourage* urban development along existing infrastructure lines, the city—and thus the Pittsburgh region—continues to suffer. These types of decisions are in direct conflict with the SPC's Goal 1, Objective a) "Support economically efficient development through redevelopment and infill in existing communities, which makes efficient use of land and infrastructure. Preserve and restore older neighborhoods; reclaim abandoned industrial sites and vacant buildings to help meet development needs." (Chapter 2, p. 2.)

Road widening projects do not take into consideration the full impact they have over historical resources. For instance, for the Route 28 widening project, the Saint Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church, a City of Pittsburgh Historic Landmark, will be negatively impacted if the project is implemented. These types of decisions are contrary to the SPC's Goal 6: "The region will have world-class cultural, heritage, historic, recreational, and entertainment assets, visited by local residents and visitors to the area." Every effort should be made to develop other transit opportunities to serve those communities along Route 28 before the option to widen the road is considered, for example water taxis and commuter railroads using the existing infrastructure. Why not incorporate Pittsburgh's historic infrastructure, i.e. existing rail lines, into new modes of transportation to suit its modern needs?

The YPA would like to echo the SPC's call for more brownfield development, as specified in Goal 1, Objective a) "reclaim abandoned industrial sites and vacant buildings to help meet development needs." There are a number of federal programs, such as the EPA's Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act, and state programs, such as Keystone Opportunity Zones and the Industrial Sites Reuse Program, available for brownfield redevelopment, along with legal waivers for development. Financial institutions have in-house expertise to supplement the public sector's investment in these areas. Station Square, Nine Mile Run, Homestead's Waterfront, the South Side Works, and Washington's Landing are but five examples of successful brownfield redevelopment projects that encourages smart growth and preserves greenspace.

In addition, the SPC has a great opportunity to influence the redevelopment of the former LTV site at Hazelwood. This site is proposed to be redeveloped based on smart growth

principles. It encourages pedestrian interaction and utilizes existing transportation and utility lines.

The YPA's Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities

Consistent with the SPC's Goal 6: "The region will have world-class cultural, heritage, historic, recreational, and entertainment assets, visited by local residents and visitors to the area" (Chapter 2, pp. 6-7), the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh recommends that the SPC take into consideration the findings from the YPA's recent "Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area." In this report, the YPA has identified ten endangered historic sites that have a good chance for restoration and reuse. These sites' revitalization would benefit the Pittsburgh region by creating jobs, encouraging pedestrian-scaled development, and utilizing existing resources. In this sense, historic preservation *is* smart growth. The YPA's report of the Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities is included with this letter.

These sites include the following:

1. Murphy Building and related structures on Main Street, Uniontown;
2. Downtown Brownsville;
3. Eighth Avenue National Register Historic District, Homestead;
4. National Negro Opera Company House, Pittsburgh (Homewood);
5. New Granada Theater, Pittsburgh (Hill District);
6. Ambridge National Register Historic District, Ambridge;
7. Peter Colley Tavern, Brier Hill-Redstone, Fayette County;
8. August Wilson Birthplace & Home, Pittsburgh (Hill District);
9. B'Nai Israel Synagogue Sanctuary, Pittsburgh (Garfield); and
10. Armstrong Cork Factory, Pittsburgh (Strip District).

Furthermore, there are three former railroad stations in Wilkinsburg, Edgewood, and Coraopolis that, properly restored, would be ideally suited as multi-modal transportation centers, consistent with the SPC's Goals 18, 19, 20, and 21 (Chapter 2, pp. 15-18) These stations are in great need of revitalization and would not only be wonderful historic assets, they would serve the multi-modal transportation needs of Allegheny County's citizens, particularly those who rely on mass transit. In addition, business and housing development around these multi-modal sites should be strongly encouraged.

The YPA believes that historic preservation must make good business sense. Each of the Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities would benefit the region by creating jobs, enhancing the local tax base, and preserving a sense of place.

YPA Recommendations

To accomplish its economic development goals, the YPA encourages the SPC to direct development funds to the Pittsburgh region's small towns and older neighborhoods in four profound ways that emphasize coordination between land use and transportation planning:

1. Encourage greater public participation.

The YPA's comments are consistent with those of Sustainable Pittsburgh: that the role of the Public Participation Panels and other public meetings should be expanded to include broader community representation, particularly from organizations and individuals representing low-income and minority residents. In addition, the YPA believes that the current comment period of 30 days should be open for 90 days at a minimum to allow for complete input from Pittsburgh's various interests.

2. Encourage the restoration and reuse of older and historic properties to create jobs, generate tax revenue, and build regional wealth.

This position is consistent with Sustainable Pittsburgh's initiative that land use planning be coordinated with transportation planning to benefit working class families and create jobs in high-unemployment areas. Historic preservation has been shown to be an important land-use planning tool, particularly for lower-income families.

In a study of historic preservation in Philadelphia, "the dividends of historic preservation come from multiple sources and have impact on every corner of the city. The lessons we have learned in The Economic Benefits of Preserving Philadelphia's Past include:

- In the last 20 years over \$1.5 Billion has been invested in historic commercial properties.
- That investment has created over 55,000 jobs and generated over \$1.3 billion in household income for Philadelphia.
- Historic neighborhoods are far more diverse racially and economically than other neighborhoods.
- The population loss in historic neighborhoods is far less than in the city as a whole.
- Far from being only mansions for the rich, Philadelphia's historic neighborhoods provide housing options for the entire range of income levels.
- While just over 6% of Philadelphia's population lives in designated historic districts, those neighborhoods are home to 24% of the city's college graduates and 28% of those with graduate and professional degrees."¹

¹ "The Economic Benefits of Preserving Philadelphia's Past," by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, 1998.

The same concepts hold true in Pittsburgh. Preservation of the region's historic assets, such as the Pittsburgh Cultural District, creates more jobs, generates more taxes, and attracts more visitors than the Steelers, Pirates, and Penguins combined. Preservation equals jobs.

3. Create more historic districts to protect valuable cultural resources and preserve a rapidly vanishing inventory of affordable housing. (SPC Goal 1 and 5.)

The SPC should encourage the restoration and reuse of older communities through historic districts to reduce overall development costs on the Pittsburgh region. In an article by Donovan Rypkema, he demonstrates that historic communities better serve the needs of minority and low-income residents. Nationally, he shows that:

- 32 percent of households below the poverty line live in older and historic homes;
- 31 percent of homeowners whose household income is less than \$20,000 per year live in older and historic homes;
- 31 percent of black homeowners and 24 percent of Hispanic homeowners live in older and historic homes;
- 29 percent of elderly homeowners live in older and historic homes; and
- 53 percent of all owner-occupied older and historic homes have monthly housing costs of less than \$500.²

Yet, we tear down 577 older and historic houses every day in the United States. In Pittsburgh alone, there are 15,000 vacant and abandoned structures, many of which have already been demolished. Meanwhile, mobile home “estates” are being constructed for lower-income homeowners on the outskirts of established towns, such as those along Route 51 in Fayette County, while the existing housing stock in older towns such as Uniontown and Brownsville continues to deteriorate or be demolished.

The SPC should advocate for the cessation of this demolition and encourage the restoration and reuse of these older and historic properties to provide for the affordable housing needs of the Pittsburgh region's residents. It is important to provide multiple options for workers to travel to their places of work, particularly low-income workers, who may rely exclusively on public transit. Developing smarter communities means providing greater choices for how workers commute to and from places of employment.

In addition, the SPC should consider population counts when preparing its Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). This is important because it takes into consideration existing population centers as places of existing transportation and utility networks. Improving

² “Historic Preservation and Affordable Housing: The Missed Connection, by Donovan Rypkema, *Forum Journal*, Spring 2003, National Trust for Historic Preservation, p. 8.

upon existing transportation networks reduces the need to create sprawling transportation, housing, and business networks that drain existing municipalities of their population, tax base, and vitality.

4. Give priority to older and historic neighborhoods for infrastructure improvements, police attention, recreation, park facilities, and schools.

Older and historic communities make good development sense and encourage multi-modal forms of transportation. Historic neighborhoods embody smart growth principles. Consider these statistics³:

Older/Historic Communities	New Communities
More than 40% of residents live within 5 miles of work.	Less than 20% lives within 5 miles of work.
More than 66% have an elementary school within a mile.	Less than 40% have an elementary school within a mile.
More than 60% have shopping within one mile.	40% have shopping within one mile.
Public transportation is available to nearly 60% of residents.	75% have no public transportation nearby.
70% have housing under \$150,000.	Barely 50% have housing under \$150,000.

In light of these statistics and consistent with the SPC’s economic development goals, the YPA encourages the SPC to do more to promote economic development in older, historic communities that creates jobs, further enhances the tax base, utilizes existing infrastructure, creates a larger supply of affordable housing, encourages public safety, and encourages the use of mass transit.

It is important for the SPC to apply these principles in practice. The SPC will have this opportunity later this month, when it votes on the gargantuan development in South Strabane Township. The development of more than 600 residential units, a golf course, outlet mall, and office space, as proposed by CNX Land Resources, Inc., runs counter to the SPC’s economic development goals. Such a development does not “preserve older neighborhoods,” does not “make coordinated, strategic investments in public water and sewer systems to protect water supplies, through repair and maintenance of existing systems and through infill to support growth and development in existing communities,” and does not “minimize development on prime agricultural lands, wetlands, steep slopes, and other environmentally sensitive lands” or “Protect woods and agricultural lands, recognizing the value of unique geography, topography, and natural resources as amenities for the region”—all outlined in the SPC’s Economic Development Goal 1.

³ *Forum Journal*, p. 10.

In an area of declining population, new retail developments outside established population centers steal sales, jobs, and tax revenue away from already developed areas. Rather than increasing the tax base, these developments on greenfield sites actually lower the base. Older and historic neighborhoods are *already* transit oriented. These neighborhoods aren't the new urbanism, they are the *real* urbanism.

The YPA encourages the SPC to adopt the Smart Growth Principles and commit to the rehabilitation of older and historic structures and achieve affordability, quality, and responsibility.

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Enclosure

C: Court Gould, Sustainable Pittsburgh
Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr., Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation
James Roddey, Allegheny County Executive
Tom Murphy, Mayor, City of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh City Council