

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For more than seven years, residents of Mount Washington, members of the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation (MWCDC) and numerous partners including the City of Pittsburgh, have been working together to create a dramatic change in the perception, use and management of the green spaces on Mount Washington. For their support of this work, the following participants are gratefully recognized as vital to the completion of this Implementation Plan:

- Members of the Open Space Task Force/Emerald Link Committee: Lynne Squilla, Bernie Lynch, and Albert Nelson
- Allegheny Land Trust
- City of Pittsburgh
 - Department of City Planning
 - Real Estate Department, especially Bill Waddell
- The Heinz Endowments

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the state. Its mission is to protect, conserve, and restore land and water for the biodiversity of the region's plants and animals and their ecosystems. Through science-based strategies, collaboration, leadership, and recognition of the relationship between humankind and nature, WPC achieves tangible conservation outcomes for present and future generations. WPC's headquarters is located at 209 Fourth Avenue, Pittsburgh PA 15222.

The Mount Washington Community Development Corporation was founded in 1990. Its mission is to balance development, the area's unique natural and historic features, and the well-being of the people who live, work, and visit the community. The CDC is located at 301 Shiloh Street, Pittsburgh PA 15211.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

From the earliest visits by settlers or scouts such as the young George Washington in 1754, Mount Washington has been regarded as a landmark at the confluence of the three rivers in Pittsburgh. The city has come to be associated with the handsome green hills of Mount Washington above the Point and with the spectacular urban landscape visible from the top of the mountain.

Mount Washington has a rich social, economic and environmental history that mirrors the story of Western Pennsylvania. Through many phases of change, including development, disinvestment and reinvestment, Mount Washington has remained a notable feature of Pittsburgh's landscape. During this current phase of the community's life, there is increased interest in the green spaces on Mount Washington. For the better part of seven years the community of Mount Washington has been working to articulate the concept and the details of a proposed green infrastructure encircling the Mountain.

Now, with new data and insight from an on-the-ground assessment of environmental resources, this concept can be presented in the form of a Master Implementation Plan. Over some eight decades, the vision of a green and imposing Mount Washington has been sustained. Grounded by fresh information about environmental conditions, current and potential, and guided by new scientific information about ecological management, the current Master Implementation Plan offers an updated strategy for making Mount Washington's green spaces into a multifaceted system of green resources to enhance every dimension of life on the Mountain.

Overview

The Implementation Plan addresses the green spaces on Mount Washington as a connected system. The Study Area covers some 450 acres, including both public and private lands currently open or largely undeveloped. The Study Area goes well beyond the original 264 acres of publicly owned land envisioned as the "Emerald Link" project. The area for study was expanded to allow a more thorough assessment of ecological conditions.

The premise of the Plan is that connected green space confers multidimensional environmental, economic, health and social benefits to the community and the region. In addition to important environmental benefits such as slope stabilization, temperature modification, pollution control, wind buffers, flood and water quality management, habitat and biodiversity, green spaces have also been documented to offer social and economic benefits related to physical and mental health, social capital and crime prevention, and higher property values with lower land management costs. Section I: "Overview, Background, Concept" documents these potential benefits in some detail and makes the case for investing in these green resources.

Mount Washington is lucky to have several significant green spaces set aside, and they offer very different opportunities from quiet contemplation to vigorous hiking or sports. Some provide habitat for wild creatures, and some are more suited for human activities. The Plan does not view these different green spaces as competitive, or assume that residents of Mount Washington must

choose among them. Rather, the Plan looks at these resources as a system, better if managed as a whole.

Finally, Section I documents the public involvement in the development of the Implementation Plan and describes the partnerships that have made the planning process possible.

History

Mount Washington's tremendous reserves of natural resources, particularly wood and coal, marked the area for industrial development from the earliest advent of outside settlers. Exploitation of these resources caused tremendous damage to air, land and water, much of which is still evident today. Over time, however, the visible evidence of damage has been camouflaged by the regrowth of greenery on much of the face of the mountain.

From as early as 1910, various plans and recommendations have been put forward to protect the hillsides and create accessible green space for residents and visitors. Four city parks were created between 1897 and 1970. An additional "greenway" was designated in the 1980's. Other portions of the area have remained green or largely undeveloped due to topography or economic conditions. Repeated attempts have been made to "improve" the physical condition of Mount Washington, including numerous plantings of more than 40 species of plants, many now considered invasives. While well intentioned, these attempts to green the mountain have in fact complicated the current condition of the ecosystem on Mount Washington.

Section II: "Mount Washington History and Environment" reviews highlights of the community's history, including its early industrial transformation, its environmental character, the consequences of resource exploitation, the century of interest in the condition of the hillsides and the availability of green space for residents, the specific history of the key parks and green spaces, and a review of the numerous attempts to "improve" the hillsides through the last 80 years. Much of this history remains largely untold and underappreciated.

Resource Assessment

A natural resource assessment was undertaken to get a clearer picture of the current conditions of Mount Washington's natural environment. The Study Area was surveyed using GPS technology to create databases and maps for future use. The data collected have been made available to the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation for its ongoing use. Section III: "Natural Resources Assessment," documents the findings of the study team, provides analysis of the information collected, and proposes a set of recommendations covering eight different topics.

Key findings include the following:

- Soils are highly disturbed and general unstable.
- 65% of the study area is forested; of that, one quarter of the forest is dominated by invasive tree species, and another one half shows signs of infestation by invasives.
- Very little "core forest" exists, with only minimal opportunity to expand these valuable habitat areas. However, there are two areas of high quality forest identified during the assessment.
- Contiguity of forest areas is frequently compromised by rights-of-way, roads, trails and other structures. The forest of Mount Washington is essentially an island of habitat

unconnected to the rivers or to other green spaces due to major barriers such as multi-lane roads and railroads.

- Features documented include views, trails, parks and obstacles to pedestrian use of the trails.
- Pedestrian trails are fragmented, but a significant system of trails does exist. Serious disruptions include rights-of-way, roads, private property, steep ravines and major roads.

Recommendations

Despite the many challenges identified by the assessment, Mount Washington has abundant opportunities to improve its green spaces, the environment in general and the value of the green spaces to the community. While the landscape has been badly damaged ecologically, there is tremendous potential for upgrading the quality of the forest and landscape and for significantly enhancing human enjoyment of this remarkable resource. Specific recommendations include:

- **Promote an ecological understanding** of green space management with the city, residents, local businesses and other partners. This recommendation underlies all the others. Continuing the type of inclusive process used during the development of the Implementation Plan, Mount Washington CDC can expand and deepen commitment to using the best possible practices that support overall improvement of the green infrastructure.
- **Restore forests by working to:** Upgrade the existing forests, expand where possible the patches of "core forest," and create more connected forest corridors. Start with the best forest areas in Chatham Village, Mount Washington Park and Duquesne Heights Greenway; improve other forested areas by planting natives, removing invasives and monitoring health.

Conditions on Mount Washington are interlinked. What is good for the forest will also be good for stabilizing slopes, improving habitat and enhancing the human experience of the forest. Much damage to slopes can be improved, if not reversed, in the course of improving forest quality.

- **Control non-native invasive species** by removal, replacement and monitoring. Start with high quality areas first; start on outer edges and work into the interior. Begin with public parcels but initiate partnerships with private landowners to expand the work onto private property. Promoting best practices for reduction and replacement of invasives will guide both public and private caretakers of the landscape.
- **Manage maintained landscapes using ecological techniques:** Focus on rights-of-way, open lands and areas where views are important. Favor native plants suited to the situation, particularly low-height plants in areas such as utility lines or public viewing sites. Develop comprehensive landscaping plans for key sites as models and inspiration for improved management.
- **Define and manage views:** Where there are apparent conflicts between ecosystem health and human preferences (such as clear views of the city, for example), ecologically

sound solutions can be found. Low-height natives plants can be used to create clear viewing areas while at the same time reducing maintenance and improving the overall appearance and health of the vegetation.

- **Stabilize slopes:** Use plantings, compost and in some case aggressive and innovative engineering to help control storm water and runoff and prevent landslides.
- **Develop pedestrian linkages and guidance:** Create a continuous “Pedestrian Link Trail” as soon as possible, starting with public parcels and existing streets and sidewalks. Move the Link Trail deeper into green space as more land is acquired, access is negotiated and obstacles are overcome. Add signage, first directional and then informational, as the link trail is accomplished. Remove obstacles such as trash.

Trails are currently not well connected but there is the skeleton of a wonderful trail system that can fulfill multiple purposes—tourism, active recreation, commuting by foot, connecting to other city destinations such as Station Square and the West End, sharing historical information, increasing environmental awareness, and offering increased contact with nature.

The assessment identified eleven different opportunities to connect and improve trails.

- **Establish a community stewardship team** to undertake all pilot projects and implement recommendations over time. Much of the work identified by the assessment is extensive and long term by nature. Environmental restoration requires repeated efforts and sometimes very long term monitoring. It will be necessary to have a skilled and dedicated cadre of people on Mount Washington available to shepherd the work of the Implementation Plan through a considerable time horizon.

Community Concerns

In addition to the natural resource assessment, the Implementation Plan process assessed community values and concerns regarding Mount Washington’s green spaces. The community identified a number of concerns:

- Coordination with the city as it works through financial recovery and implements policies and practices that impact Mount Washington’s green space;
- Clarifying ownership and status of green space to consolidate and secure open space for public use;
- Hillside protection and zoning;
- Facilities and infrastructure in parks and green spaces;
- Maintenance of parks and green spaces;
- Development near parks and green spaces;
- Property protection and acquisition;
- Management and stewardship of green spaces;
- Education and programming for residents and visitors to Mount Washington making connections between history, green spaces and the story of the mountain.

The activities the community is undertaking in each of these areas are detailed in Section IV: “Community Values and Concerns.”

This section also details key values identified by residents for each of the major green spaces, and identifies goals for each of these key green places.

Pilot Projects

As a way to organize priorities and to help the community undertake major projects in a manageable and measured way, the Master Implementation Plan identifies 8 key Pilot Projects. Based on a combination of the natural resource assessment and the community values and issues assessment, the Pilot Projects cover a range of environmental, aesthetic, management and sociocultural opportunities. All Pilot Projects were selected to be manageable, achievable, affordable, and good models for learning ecological techniques and demonstrating the benefits of implementing all the recommendations over time.

The 8 Pilot Projects include:

- #1: Improve Habitat and Restoring Forest (near Chatham Village)
- #2: Revegetate Open Land Using Natives (near Duquesne Incline)
- #3: Control Invasive Species (Mount Washington Park)
- #4: Define Views Using Natives (3 options)
- #5: Create a New View (Saddle overlook)
- #6: Establish a New Trail Link (two options)
- #7: Eliminate Hazards (two options)
- # 8: Improve Pedestrian Access (Duquesne Heights Greenway)

Section V: "Pilot Projects" describes each project, offers a timeline, some guidance on costs, a description of benefits and an indication of potential challenges.

Action Plan

Section VI: "Action Plan" summarizes the activities for the community to initiate over the next two to ten years to make the "green infrastructure" of Mount Washington a reality. The Action Time Line lays out a view of these activities over the next few years.

The proposed effort includes adding to the current publicly owned green spaces and increasing the security of those green spaces in perpetuity. At the time of publication, the Mount Washington CDC is now proposing to unite all these green spaces into one park area. As a way of connecting the park effort with the existing Grand View State Scenic Byway, the CDC is now referring to the Emerald Link area, plus some additional sites, as "Grand View Scenic Byway Park." For this report, "Study Area" is used to designate the larger area covered by the natural resource assessment. "Emerald Link" is used to describe the original set of publicly owned green space that is part of the original scope of work for this project.