
Anti-Displacement Strategies in Pittsburgh's Hill District

How One Historic African-American Neighborhood is Harnessing its
Development Potential to Sustain and Benefit Long-Time Residents



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Regional Housing Legal Services is a nonprofit law firm with unique expertise in affordable, sustainable housing and its related components — community and economic development, utility matters and preservation of home ownership. RHLS provides innovative project and policy solutions that help create sustainable communities offering decent, safe and affordable housing for lower-income Pennsylvanians.



Pittsburgh's Hill District

The Hill District enjoys one of the best locations in Pittsburgh, sloping gently upward from downtown, with magnificent views in all directions.



Like many Black communities throughout the country, the Hill was excluded from the post-war housing boom through FHA mortgage redlining, and became increasingly disinvested, blighted, segregated and isolated. But because of its strategic location, there is renewed development interest in the neighborhood. There is also a committed core of residents and organizations that are dedicated to revitalizing the Hill in an equitable manner.

“Crossroads of the World”

-- Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay

The Hill District has a rich history as a center of African-American culture in Pittsburgh and beyond.



- Some of the Hill District’s first residents were black revolutionary war soldiers, and in the 19th Century the Lower Hill (“Little Hayti”) became a center of abolitionism and black nationalism
- In the 1930s through the 1950s, the Hill District was nationally known for its thriving jazz scene
- Hill District resident August Wilson won Pulitzer Prizes and international acclaim for his plays depicting life in the Hill

Disinvestment and Urban Renewal

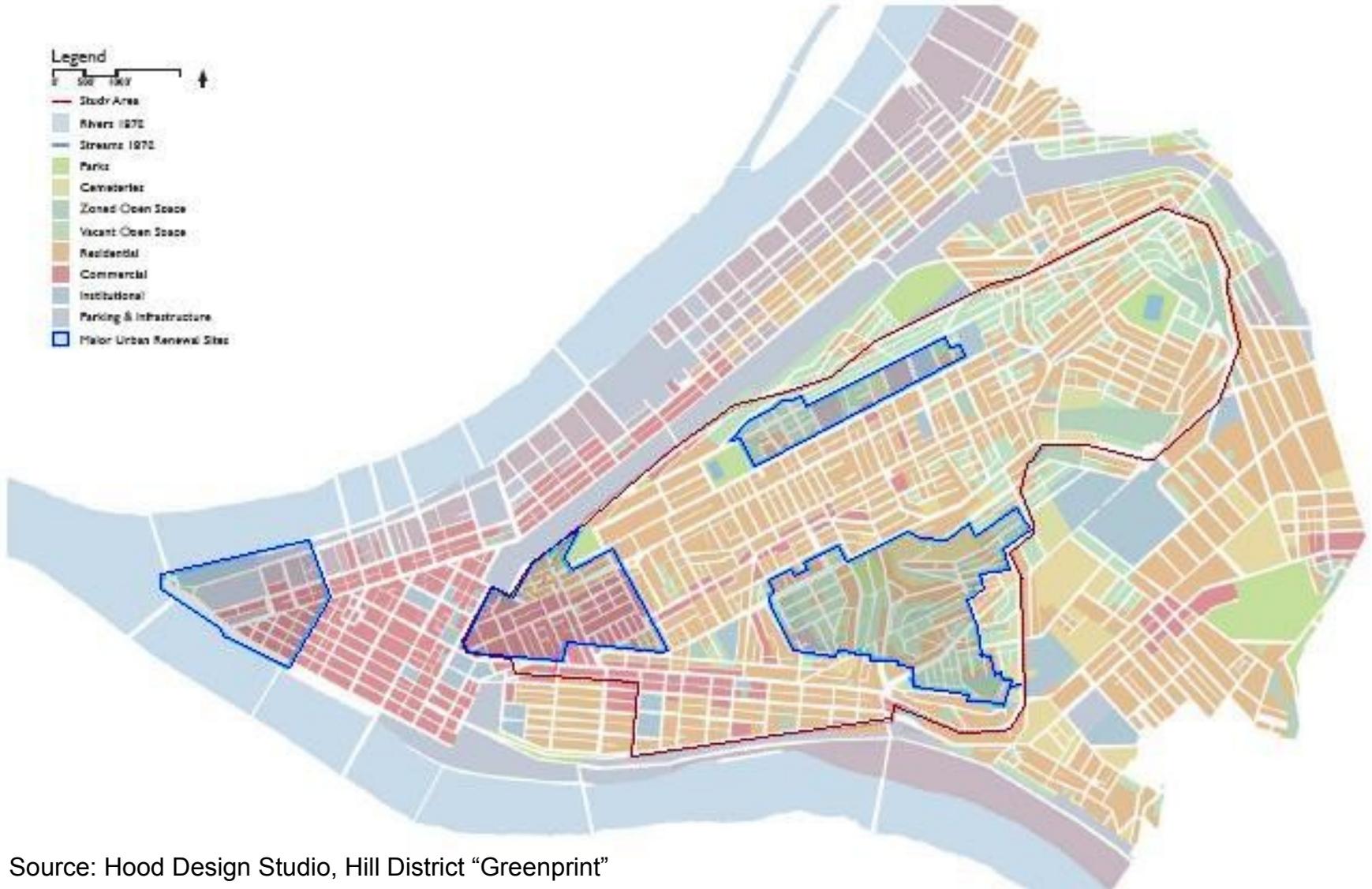
As federal housing policy drove capital and white residents from the Hill, the major government responses – demolition, public housing and urban renewal – made matters worse.

In the Lower Hill:

- 1300 buildings on 95 acres of land were demolished
- 413 businesses and over 8,000 residents were forced to relocate
- The Hill District lost its commercial core and much of its population, and was left disconnected from economic opportunities

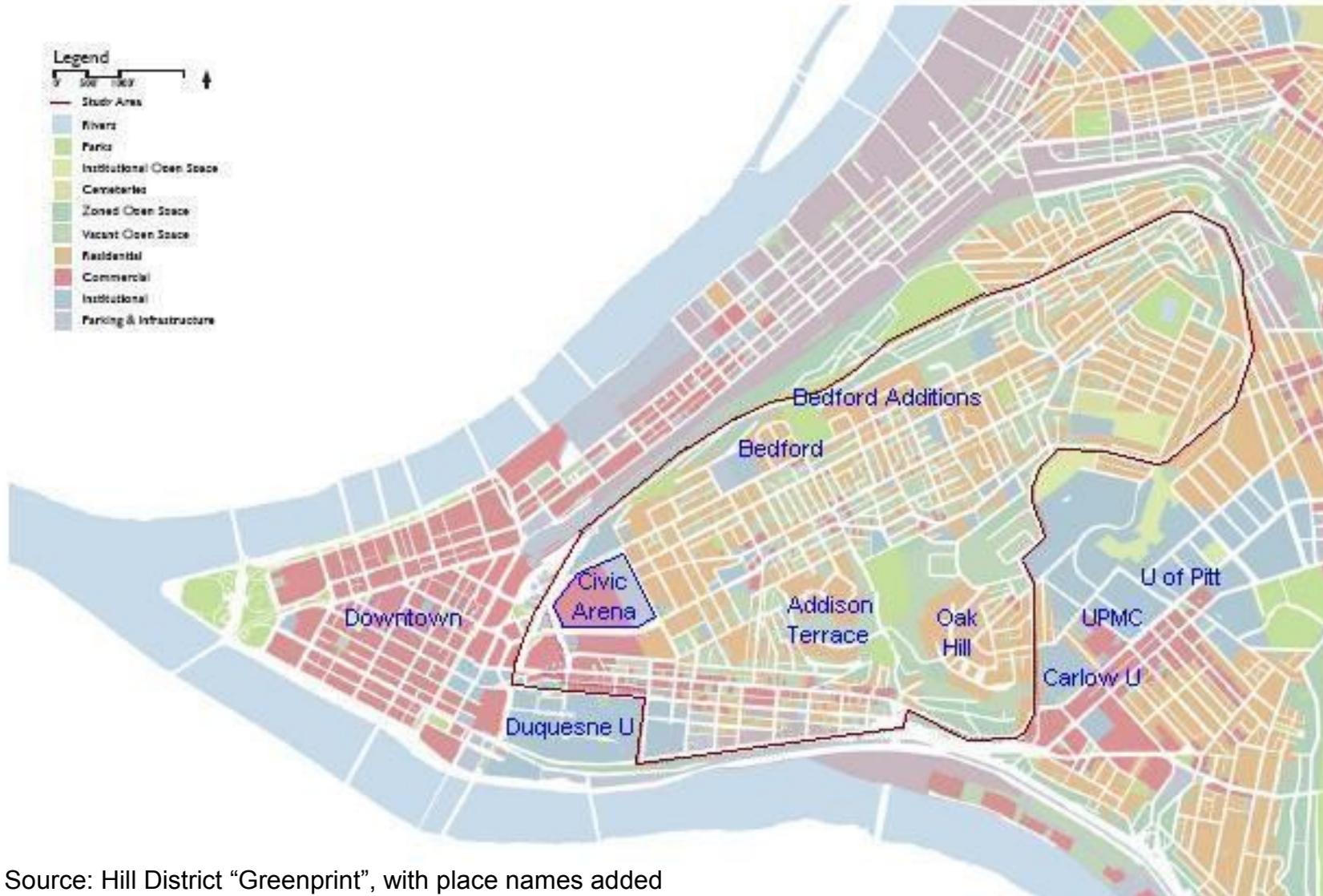


Hill District Urban Renewal Sites



Source: Hood Design Studio, Hill District "Greenprint"

Hill District Current Land Use



Source: Hill District "Greenprint", with place names added

Development for Whom?

Discriminatory housing policy and lack of access to jobs has left many Hill District residents with low incomes and insecure housing:

Ownership: Only 29% of the homes in the Hill are owner-occupied, and many are tax delinquent, in substandard condition, and/or without clear legal title

Income: The median income is less than \$15,000. 1/2 of all renters and 1/4 of all homeowners pay more than 30% of their incomes on housing

Public Housing: 1/4 of the housing units in the Hill are public housing

These conditions make many residents vulnerable to displacement as development comes to the Hill and property values increase

The Challenges Facing the Hill Today



1. How to ensure that long-time residents will be able to enjoy the benefits of a revitalized neighborhood
2. How to “reclaim” the Lower Hill District and reintegrate the area into the cultural fabric of the community
3. How to increase community ownership and control over neighborhood assets

The following pages describe the steps that Hill District residents are taking to respond to these challenges

Community Benefits Agreement

In 2008, the One Hill Neighborhood Coalition (over 100 businesses and community groups) negotiated a CBA around the development of a new hockey arena in the Lower Hill. Highlights include:

- \$2 million for a new grocery store
- \$500,000 per year for 6-12 years for a community fund to address critical needs in the Hill (Hill District “NPP”)
- First consideration for all jobs that are created as a result of development in the Lower Hill
- Funding for a Hill District Master Plan, and a ***commitment that all development decisions by public entities will be guided by the Master Plan***



Neighborhood Partnership Program

The Hill District NPP is designed to address critical needs that were identified and prioritized by the Hill District community in the lead-up to CBA negotiations. Highlights include:



- An education reform effort to reverse the racial academic achievement gap in Hill District public schools
- Home rehab grants and “equity protection” services to help resolve tax delinquency and tangled title issues
- Foreclosure prevention services and financial literacy education
- A “GreenPrint” to develop and improve public spaces throughout the Hill
- Outreach, case management and violence prevention services

Hill District Master Plan

A 40-person Management Committee oversaw the Master Plan, and the Hill District Consensus Group (over 100 businesses, organizations and residents) coordinated community input as follows:



- Convened a **Planning Forum** to develop community consensus around planning issues
- Held a **Planning School** to give residents the tools they need to participate effectively
- Established **Sector Committees** to engage stakeholders around specific issues (housing, parks, transportation, business, etc.)

The Planning Forum adopted a set of **Development Principles**, **Anti-Displacement Strategies** and **Strategies for Reclaiming the Lower Hill**, and insisted that they be included in the Master Plan

Hill District Development Principles

Will serve as guidelines for development activities and the allocation of public resources in the Hill. Highlights include:

Right Historical Wrongs: Demolish the Civic Arena, restore the previous street grid, and refer to the area as the “Lower Hill”

Economic Justice: All developments must include first-source hiring agreements and MBE/WBE participation of at least 30%/15%

Neighborhood-Driven Civic Design: Input from residents must be included in all stages of development planning

Green and Healthy Environment: All plans must include green space, trees, parks and playgrounds; views must be preserved

Use Neighborhood Strengths: Public art must honor the legacy of the Hill as a predominantly African-American neighborhood

Anti-Displacement Strategies

Intended to ensure that existing residents enjoy the benefits of a revitalized Hill. Highlights include:

Economic Opportunities: Explicit first-source hiring and MBE/WBE participation requirements

Homeowner Support: Funding priority for owner-occupied rehab grants and equity protection services

Build First: All developments must minimize displacement by building replacement housing first or through similar means
Example: Bedford Hill HOPE VI (Hill District)

Community Ownership: Projects receiving a public subsidy should include a community organization as co-owner, with a share of profits, approval over major decisions, and right of first refusal if the project is sold

Strategies for Reclaiming the Lower Hill

Intended to reintegrate the Lower Hill into the cultural fabric of the community. Highlights include:

Design: Reflect existing design and mark the entrance to the neighborhood with a structure that honors its history and culture

Inclusionary Housing: At least 30% of all units must be affordable to very low-income people – a higher set-aside (50%) and deeper income targeting (extremely low-income) if public subsidy is used

Example: Boston Chinatown Community Benefit Criteria

Right to Return: New housing must give an admissions preference for persons displaced by urban renewal

Inclusionary & Neighborhood-Scale Retail: At least 20% of all commercial space should be reserved for Hill District businesses; best efforts to achieve 1/3 local, 1/3 regional and 1/3 national retail

Example: CIM project (San Jose, CA)

Enforceability

The Development Principles and Strategies may be enforced judicially (through the CBA) or through community mobilization:

Projects receiving public funding or publicly-owned property:

- Under the CBA, all public decisions regarding project selection and development activities must be guided by the Master Plan

Projects requiring zoning or land use approval:

- The Zoning Board and Planning Commission use master plans to guide their decisions on zoning or land use requests
 - Under the CBA, all development plans must be guided by the Master Plan
 - The Hill District Planning Forum (over 70 residents, businesses and community groups) will use the Development Principles and Strategies to evaluate development projects for community support or opposition
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For More Information

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