

HISTORY, CONTEXT AND PUBLIC POLICY

Ample Opportunity: A Community Dialogue 1

Wednesday, July 2, 1997

Introduction: In this first workshop, two panels of experts presented background issues on the history and policy associated with open space in the Nine Mile Run valley. After the panel presentations, the workshop divided into two roundtables and one site hike to encourage small group discussions. Scanners and cameras were set up to collect historical materials and oral histories from the community throughout the event.

Review: Upon completion, we felt this event had too many presentations and too few opportunities for public discussion and comment. Some community members felt that the NMR-GP decision to focus on the public space question was a short-sighted approach to the larger development process. We decided to remain focused on the public space issues.

Attendance: 78 participants

Advisors:

Don Berman, *Solid Waste Consultant, former Director of the Allegheny County Division of Waste Management*

Mr. Berman has over 40 years experience in the fields of environmental and public works engineering, including preparation of regional solid waste, sewage, water and stormwater management plans.

Andrew McElwaine, *Program Officer and Director of Environmental Programs, the Heinz Endowments*
During the '80s, Mr. McElwaine served as legislative assistant and subcommittee staff director to the late U.S. Senator John Heinz. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in history, focusing his research on Nine Mile Run.

Ted Muller, *Head, Department of History, University of Pittsburgh*

Author of a two-part series on the work of the Olmsteds in Pittsburgh published in *Pittsburgh History* (1991).

Joe Plummer, *Executive Director, Environmental City Initiative*

The Environmental City Initiative was created by Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy and the Chair of the Howard Heinz Endowment, Teresa Heinz, as a unique central resource to position our region as a world center of environmental solutions. Mr. Plummer was formerly Vice-President, Public and Community Affairs, for the Duquesne Light Company.

Ray Reaves, *Planning Consultant, former Director, the Allegheny County Planning Department*

During his directorship, the Planning Department produced the Allegheny County Greenways Plan, the Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory, a Stormwater District Analysis, and the Allegheny County Bikeway Plan.

Joel Tarr, *Richard S. Caliguiri Professor of Urban and Environmental History and Policy, Carnegie Mellon University*

Dr. Tarr has been a member of several National Research Council committees investigating urban infrastructure. His present research includes studies of industrial and municipal pollution. A collection of his essays, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective*, was recently published by the University of Akron (Series in Technology and the Environment).

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History, Context and Public Policy Advisory Group
Background Document



" Perhaps the most striking opportunity noted for a large park is the valley of Nine Mile Run. Its long meadows of varying width would make ideal playfields; the stream, when it is freed from sewage, will be an attractive and interesting element in the landscape; the wooded slopes on either side give ample opportunity for enjoyment of the forest, for shaded walks and cool resting places."

—Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., 1910



View in Nine Mile Run valley, 1923



General view looking up Nine Mile Run valley from Calvary Cemetery.



Same view of Nine Mile Run, 1997

I. Public Participation in the Nine Mile Run Greenway Project

The STUDIO for Creative Inquiry

The STUDIO for Creative Inquiry is an interdisciplinary center in the College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University. The mission of the STUDIO is to support cross-disciplinary and exploratory work in the arts.

The Objective of the Nine Mile Run Project

The STUDIO is working in partnership with the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority, and the Environmental City Initiative to realize the following objectives at Nine Mile Run:

- develop stewardship for the Nine Mile Run **Greenway**
- identify and model sustainable approaches to public greenway development
- utilize contemporary methods and technologies to communicate about complex environmental problems
- promote ecological standards for **brownfields** reclamation

The Nine Mile Run Greenway Project connects the expertise and concerns of artists, scientists, engineers, historians, the public, and planners in a broad-ranging interdisciplinary effort to address challenges and opportunities faced in transforming an urban, industrial waste site into a sustainable urban greenway.

The interdisciplinary process will inform the greenway planning with alternatives which are normally not presented in the public development process. The STUDIO's public participation process will parallel the housing development planning process, which is set forth in chart 1.

Greenway — 1. A linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridgeline, or overland along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route. 2. Any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage. 3. An open space connector linking parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and with populated areas. 4. Locally, certain strip or linear parks designated as a parkway or greenbelt. From Charles Little, *Greenways for America*, p.1, (John Hopkins University Press, 1990). See also, Jack Ahern's Discussion at the Sustainable Open Space Workshop.

Brownfield — The Environmental Protection Agency's definition of a brownfield is "an abandoned, idled or underused industrial or commercial facility, where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.

II. History/Context

The value shifts that transformed the site

An inspection of the history, the land use values, and the changing landscape of Nine Mile Run provide a reflection of Pittsburgh's social, political and cultural heritage. Chart 2 on page 23 presents a summary of the changing character of Nine Mile Run during five generalized historic periods. Additional discussion on the history of Nine Mile Run can be accessed at the project's website <http://noumenon.cfa.cmu.edu/nmr/>.

The History of Nine Mile Run

by Joel A. Tarr

The history of Nine Mile Run provides a classic example of a clash between those who held values of **utilitarianism** and those who focused on the preservation of areas of natural beauty for use as urban recreational facilities. Nine Mile Run and its watershed area forms a natural drainage basin of the Monongahela River. The **watershed** has a land area of approximately 5 square miles and the stream valley consists of approximately 250 acres. During the 19th century, portions of the valley had been used variously for farming, as a **salt works**, as the location for several natural gas wells, and as a golf course. While the lower valley leading to the Monongahela River was relatively undeveloped as of 1910, areas of Pittsburgh, as well as the boroughs of Swissvale, Wilkinsburg, and Edgewood, had shaped the upper valley for residential purposes and had placed portions of Nine Mile Run into **culverts** to accommodate development.

During the early part of the 20th century, Pittsburgh underwent a period of civic reform. As part of this process, in 1910 Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., son of the famous landscape designer, prepared a report for the Pittsburgh Civic Commission, making a number of suggestions for urban betterment. In his report, Olmsted identified Nine Mile Run as the "most striking opportunity...for a large park," but no action was taken on his proposal. In 1923, the Citizens' Committee on Civic Plan, another elite group attempting to improve the Pittsburgh environment, issued a report on parks. In this report, the Committee proposed the development of Nine Mile Run as a waterfront park with a range of recreational facilities. Like Olmsted's recommendation, however, this one was never implemented. In fact, in 1922 the Duquesne Slag Company, which had purchased 94 acres in the valley in that year, began filling it with **slag** from neighboring steel mills.

Duquesne Slag's land purchase occurred just before passage of the Pittsburgh Zoning ordinance. While all 238 acres of Nine Mile Run valley were zoned residential, the 94 acre land purchase and Duquesne Slag's use of it for slag dumping "grandfathered" the firm's activities in the valley. Between 1922 and 1962, Duquesne Slag purchased further acreage in the valley, filling it with millions of tons of slag even though the valley was zoned "residential." Duquesne Slag acted on the justification that it had owned property in the valley prior to the creation of zoning and that its slag dumping was a "non-conforming use." Protests over the years about the firm's dumping activity, primarily by the Swisshelm Park Civic Association, had little effect in reducing its dumping or controlling nuisances. By 1972, when slag dumping ceased, approximately 17 million cubic yards of slag filled the valley.

Utilitarianism — A doctrine that the useful is the good and that the determining consideration of right conduct should be the usefulness of its consequences.

Watershed — A region or area bounded peripherally by a water parting and draining ultimately to a particular watercourse or body of water.

Salt works — Historic sites where salt was mined commercially.

Culvert — A pipe used to encase a stream or river usually placed underground.

Slag — The refuse from melting of metals or reduction of ores.

Because Nine Mile Run is the largest area of undeveloped land within the Pittsburgh city boundaries, several attempts have been made in recent decades to develop it. In 1982, for instance, the Department of City Planning explored the possibilities for residential and light industrial development, but could not attract a developer. In 1987, J. J. Gumberg, a shopping center developer, obtained an option to buy the site and proposed to build a shopping and office center on it. Citizens from nearby residential areas, however, objected to highway construction related to the Gumberg plan and were able to block development. Finally, in October of 1995, the city of Pittsburgh purchased the 238 acre site for \$3.8 million and selected a development team to begin the transformation of Nine Mile Run into a residential complex and an associated greenway.

Issues to be addressed at the workshop:

- Who made the decisions that transformed the landscape at Nine Mile Run?
- What were the dominant values influencing those decisions?

Sustainability and Site Context

The original values of respect for the valley environment should be explored to inform a public greenway design today. The residents of the East End continued to experience the Nine Mile Run valley in many ways even while its use as a slag dump dominated the landscape. Understanding history is a first step to developing a renewed sense of place. Through public participation and interdisciplinary research, the Nine Mile Run Greenway Project will encourage a convergence of ecological, community, and economic interests in the public greenway.

Nine Mile Run provides an important opportunity to link the **Three Rivers Heritage Trail** and **Steel Industry Heritage Trail** networks with greenways reaching into the neighborhoods on the hills. Homewood, Regent Square, Park Place, Point Breeze, and Squirrel Hill can all have easy non-motorized connections to the growing greenway network via Frick Park.

Issues to be addressed at the workshop:

- How can we use history and fine arts to regain a sense of place on a damaged landscape?
- How can we make the public more aware of the availability and opportunity of the greenway?

Those that live, work and play in and around Nine Mile Run are most intimately familiar with the site. The project team continues to gather

Three Rivers Heritage Trail and the Steel Industry Heritage Trail — Riverfront trails along the Monongahela River being developed by the Friends of the Riverfront and the Steel Industry Heritage Corp., respectively. These trails make up the urban northern corridor (McKeesport to Pittsburgh) of the 340 mile rail/trail extending to Washington D.C.

information, experience and insight from those who know the site first-hand.

III. Public Policy

The benefits of intermunicipal cooperation and geographic resource management in the watershed

Municipal boundaries are one of the greatest obstacles to the treatment of pollution in the watershed. Because of the lines drawn for municipal boundaries, public resources are not shared widely enough to address the sewage, garbage, urban runoff, industrial contamination and land use pollution issues that flow across the boundaries of the 130 municipalities of Allegheny County.

State and federal environmental programs encourage public participation and a geographic focus on watersheds that often encompass several municipalities. Nine Mile Run, with its proposed urban in-fill development and relatively small scale, provides an opportunity to model this new program focus.

In fact, Pennsylvania has a number of programs which can potentially fund urban watershed projects. The project team has identified the following programs as having potential to fund infrastructure improvements in the Nine Mile Run watershed: Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Stormwater Management Program, DEP's Nonpoint Source Management Program, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Rivers Conservation Program, and infrastructure loans through the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority. These are all very competitive programs with rigorous review processes.

Issues to be addressed at the workshop:

- How do we overcome the conflicting responsibilities and lack of communication which has contributed to the damaged landscape at Nine Mile Run?
- How can we become more efficient through multi-municipal cooperation?

Public finance mechanisms to fund the ongoing maintenance of the greenway

Urban greenways have an economic value which is hard to measure and easy to overlook. Chart 3 represents a number of studies which have measured the economic value of urban greenways. The Nine Mile Run Greenway can have a valuable economic impact.

The decisions made with regard to the Nine Mile Run development project can overcome the continuing conflict between commercial and environmental values and bring these values together in a project that works. For this to happen, the economic measures have to be corrected to include quality of life and the public sector must be the catalyst. Examples of funding strategies demonstrate how commercial and environmental values can be combined in programs that fund greenways.

Issues to be addressed at the workshop:

- What are the economic benefits of public greenways?

Chart 1

The Built Environment: PUBLIC PROCESS FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

- JULY-OCT. 1997 **1. Issue-Oriented Community Meetings**
Purpose: To inform the community of findings regarding residential development.
- Community Participation: Community interacts directly with Urban Redevelopment Authority and its consultants.
- NOV.-DEC. 1997 **2. Preliminary Plan Approval**
Purpose: To express concerns to the developer and impose conditions within the bounds of the City Code.
- Community Participation: Planning Commission takes action and places conditions on plan approval after taking public testimony.
- MARCH. 1997 **3. Zoning Change**
Purpose: To change the zoning to allow for a planned development district.
- Community Participation: City Council takes action after public hearing(s).
- SPRING 1998 **4. Final Development Plan Review**
Purpose: To complete a final review of the project details proposed by the developers.
- Community Participation: Planning Commission takes action after hearing public testimony.

Note: This schedule is provided by the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning and the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority. City Council has scheduled a public hearing on March 12, 1998 to hear testimony on the the zoning change. The schedule is subject to change.

Chart 2 Historical Periods and Land Issues

	PREVALENT LAND USE ISSUES	CITIZEN'S ROLE IN LAND-USE DECISION-MAKING	INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE WATERSHED	EFFECT ON NINE MILE RUN/FRICK PARK AREA
European Settlement	Taming the wilderness	Individual within the boundary of law	Trails and paths	Remains a "natural valley"
	Creating utility out of nature's chaos	Squatters		
Early Industrial Development	Inconsistent pattern of infrastructure development		Covered streams Sewer lines	Hunting clubs, salt wells, gas wells
	Natural beauty "recreated" in a few formal gardens		Railroads and trolleys	
			Local road systems	
Steel and the Expanding City	Parks and natural beauty as a social tool	Top-down by the elite for the worker	Intensive development of transportation network and utilities	Frick Park created with an endowment
	Relief from urban stress	The Pittsburgh Survey		Golf course
		The Citizens' Committee on Parks		A large portion of the valley is purchased for slag dumping
Economic Utilization	Economic enhancement of urban development	The business community makes decisions for the public	Parkway East and Squirrel Hill Tunnels	Continued slag dumping in valley
	The privatization of public space	Allegheny Conference on Community Dev.	Maintenance needs of parks begin to exceed resources	
Sustainability	Restoring economic activity on post-industrial sites	Elected officials in public-private investment (bond issues)	Infrastructure requires extensive maintenance repair	Reclamation of economic use and public space
		The citizen advocate	New greenways are considered	

Chart 3 Economic Benefits of Greenways

	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE	SOURCE
Increase Private Property Value	Studies show that property located near or adjacent to greenways increases in value.	A study in Boulder, Colorado revealed that the average value of property adjacent to a greenway would be 32% higher than property 6/10 of a mile away.	Correll, Lillydahl and Signell, 1978
Increase Property Tax Revenues	Higher property values that result from location near greenways, increased revenues from property taxes.	The same Boulder study revealed that the aggregate property values for one neighborhood was \$5.4 million more because of the greenway.	Correll, Lillydahl and Signell, 1978
Provide Business Opportunities	Greenways provide opportunities for concessions, equipment sales and rentals, and lodging.	An economic benefits analysis of a completed urban riverfront trail estimates that trail users will spend over \$10 million each year on food and drink, entertainment, local transportation, and retail purchases.	Tripp, Umbach & Associates, Inc. "Economic Impact of the Proposed Three Rivers Heritage Trail on the City of Pittsburgh," 1993
Attract New Businesses	High quality of life attracts businesses. Greenways increase quality of life and encourage employee fitness.	An annual survey by Cushman and Wakefield revealed that the quality of life for their employees was the third most important factor in locating a business, according to chief executives polled.	Governor's Committee on the Environment, 1988
Expenditures by Residents Contribute to Economic Activity	Outdoor recreation is a major component of leisure. Leisure and recreation expenditures can account for a substantial part of people's discretionary spending.	In Pennsylvania, residents spent approximately 12.6% of their personal consumption dollars on leisure pursuits. Of this, over 47% was spent for outdoor recreation.	National Park Service, 1983