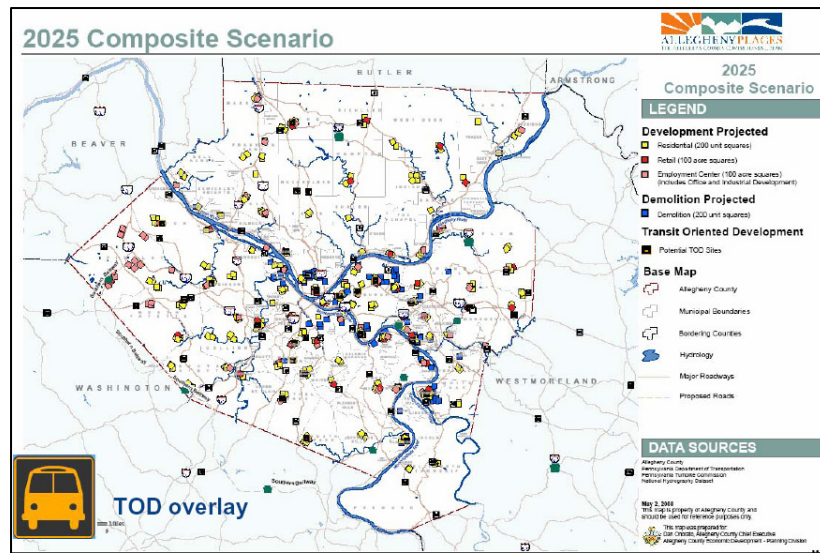# Allegheny Places

County Comprehensive Plan: "What's Your Favorite Place?"

Location: Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
Partners: Allegheny County; McCormick Taylor, Inc. as lead consultant; CommunityViz support provided by Donley & Associates, Inc.

Context: Allegheny County in southwestern PA is home to the City of Pittsburgh—and 129 other municipalities. While Pittsburgh is the economic and cultural center of the County and region, the County's many municipalities contain great diversity. Old mill towns, new suburbs, river towns and rural villages are part of a complex geographic, social, and economic landscape. Once reeling from the collapse of the steel industry, Allegheny County is now diversifying its economy and planning for its future.

Allegheny Places is Allegheny County's first comprehensive land use plan. The culmination of many years' hard work and an intensive public outreach effort, *Allegheny Places* establishes an overall vision for the future of the County and provides a road map to get there. Data collection and analysis was an important part of the planning process; however, attaining full participation from its many municipalities and diverse population was equally important. The "What's Your Favorite Place?" campaign was the key to evoking citizen interest and also inspired the name of the plan. Through the campaign the County learned what places and which qualities of life its residents valued most, and built on them to create a future vision for Allegheny County. In all more than 3,000 people from around the County participated in the Plan development.

Project Description: CommunityViz® was used to measure how well different future land use scenarios, or alternatives, met the Plan goals and objectives by merging public input and geographic information. The results of the CommunityViz analysis were communicated to the public through graphs, charts and other illustrations.

Census data, local development data, and population and employment trends were analyzed by the University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research, paying particular attention to recent development patterns and market trends. The amount and type of future new

> *"The use of the analytical and presentation tools in CommunityViz allowed us to combine the art of planning with the science of planning, resulting in a plan that has a good factual basis and the enthusiastic support of county residents."*
>
> —Leanne Doran, McCormick Taylor, Inc.

> *"A major focus of Allegheny Places was creating a plan for the future in which all County residents would have equitable access to decent, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, transit, good jobs, good schools, and recreation. CommunityViz gave us a way to actually test how well the Future Land Use plan met these important goals."*
>
> —Kay Pierce, Manager Planning Division, Allegheny County

development was projected, mapped and presented on a Trend Scenario map. A unique feature of the Trend Scenario is that it mapped projected losses of existing buildings based on past demolition trends. Based on extensive public feedback, and strong reaction against the Trend Scenario, four alternatives to the Trend were developed: Good Old Places, Hot New Places, River Places and Transit Oriented Places.

Each alternative was then put to the test using CommunityViz to evaluate its performance in areas such as congestion on county roadways, availability of water and sewer infrastructure, access to recreation and jobs, and acres of floodplains and greenfields developed. "Equity and diversity" was a major focus of the Plan, so indicators such as "access to transit" and "amount of development in low income communities" were also measured. The best elements of each scenario were then combined into the "2025 Composite Scenario" and tested again using CommunityViz. The resulting Future Land Use Plan is the basis of the County's new Comprehensive Plan.

Technology and Tools: CommunityViz 3.0 was used to combine and analyze data, and to illustrate the analyses in a variety of public venues. Tools within CommunityViz Scenario 360™ that were used included: the Common Impacts Wizard, the Suitability Wizard, and the Optimizer Wizard. Other methods used to engage the public included the "What's Your Favorite Place?" campaign, outreach meetings, an interactive project website, youth outreach, and surveys. Public participation culminated in a series of public meetings held around the county, at which participants could locate chips representing future development on maps to determine a preferred future land use scenario. County Executive Dan Onorato opened each public meeting with a 20-minute video presentation specifically designed to educate citizens about planning and encourage their participation.

Outcomes: *Allegheny Places*, the Allegheny County comprehensive plan, was adopted in November, 2008. The final plan includes the full 170-page text plan, the plan maps book, Executive Summary, and a large format Poster Plan—all of which are also available on-line. An interactive on-line "map viewer" will

KEY LINKS

CommunityViz
 http://www.communityviz.com
Allegheny County
 http://www.alleghenycounty.us
Allegheny Places Project Website
 http://www.alleghenyplaces.com
McCormick Taylor, Inc.
 http://www.mccormicktaylor.com
Donley & Associates, Inc
 http://www.donleyassociates.com

enable the public to view the plan maps from the county to the local scale. The extensive GIS database created for the plan will be available to municipalities and others. The Plan is used as a policy guide in the review of development proposals that seek County resources, and provides support for several new initiatives: Allegheny Green, a county-wide initiative focused on promoting sustainability; and an initiative to link Pittsburgh to Erie, PA via a trail along the Allegheny River. As County Chief Executive Dan Onorato noted, "Allegheny County is home to the urban core of Southwestern Pennsylvania. How we plan for the future impacts all of our surrounding Counties and our region."