

New Kensington Area Weed & Seed Revitalization Plan 2009

Final Draft

INTRODUCTION

New Kensington is a third class city located in Westmoreland County along the Allegheny River approximately 20 miles north of Pittsburgh.

As many Cities in Southwestern PA, we have suffered an economic and a population decline as a result of the closing of manufacturing facilities, and the loss of a strong retail market and commercial businesses. This has been accompanied by a weakening of the tax base which resulted in a decline of both the infrastructure and in the community's ability to maintain it. The area has also experienced a number of ills associated with economic decline, as will be further detailed in this plan.

The population of the community is 14,700; approximately 29% are senior citizens who are on a fixed income. Additionally % of the community is under the age of 18 and most are not yet employed. A % of area adults are in need of literacy and employment training. These populations further weaken the tax base.

We were designated a Pennsylvania Weed and Seed site on July 1, 2002 and have experienced numerous accomplishments. Our community needs are ongoing; our vision is to expand on our accomplishments and address future needs as they arise.

HISTORY

In the late 1800's the community was established to take advantage of the thriving commercial industrial center that Pittsburgh had become. Throughout the latter part of the 19th century, companies such as Alcoa and American Saint-Gobain moved to the area and flourished. As the community continued its growth it became an area of home ownership. Places for worship increased, a thriving commercial district was born and the area became the center for industry in the Alle Kiski Valley.

With industrial growth came educational, social, and other amenities that thrive in a community as it grows and prospers.

Unfortunately the situation began to change as the industrial base began to erode and all but disappear. Companies left, one after another. With the shutdown of Alcoa the thriving commercial district began to deteriorate and vacant buildings began to crowd streets that were once bustling with consumers. As jobs were lost unemployment grew, homeownership eroded and the population base began to decline.

The void that was left by the fleeing industries and their commercial and social counterparts was filled with various social ills. These included higher crime rates, increased drug trafficking, more families living at poverty level dependent on welfare and unemployment benefits, lack of regard for educational and other social values, declining test scores and high school graduation rates, rental units instead of homeownership, a more transient population, and vacant and dilapidated residences and commercial buildings.

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On July 1, 2002 the cities of New Kensington and Arnold received a joint designation as a Weed and Seed site and the first revitalization plan was submitted. Because of budgetary restraints, the City of Arnold reluctantly decided to withdraw from the Initiative; as of July 2009 the City of New Kensington will independently pursue Weed and Seed status for the community.

MISSION STATEMENT

To enrich the quality of life in the community by creating and maintaining community partnerships that promote and improve public safety, economic development, education, infrastructure and enhanced community services.

VISION STATEMENT

The vision is to implement a multilevel plan that includes four basic components: law enforcement; community policing; prevention, intervention and treatment; and neighborhood restoration.

THE COMMUNITY PLAN

Beginning in July 2002, with the help of Pennsylvania State Police and Operation Trigger Lock, the police departments initiated an undercover operation to commence the Weed phase. Operation Trigger Lock is a Department of Justice initiative that targets violent offenders for prosecution in Federal court and takes advantage of tough Federal firearms laws. This effort continued through saturation patrols and other increased police activity on the streets of New Kensington and Arnold, and resulted in numerous arrests and prosecutions. As crime has diminished in our current *target area* we have seen a slight increase in crime in our residential hill area. This change prompts us to expand our target area to include several additional streets. In addition to the weeding efforts, portions of the funding were used for seeding activities such as after school programs, micro enterprise initiatives and numerous public relations activities. The newly restructured community Weed and Seed Initiative is governed by an Assistance for Impact Delegation (“AID”) team made up of a diverse group of community volunteers including *target area* residents. The team meets monthly and oversees subcommittees, also comprised of community volunteers. Currently our subcommittees are addressing issues such as public relations, economic development, health, education, and public safety.

In addition to Operation Trigger Lock and saturation patrols, current funding supports a community wide curfew, a juvenile ride along program in partnership with Westmoreland County, Community Oriented Policing (COPS), adult literacy programs, and a Healthy Kids program through the local YMCA. An expanded list of program accomplishments can be found in **Appendix A**

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The process to involve the community began with two town hall meetings held at separate locations. These meetings were comprised of a cross section of over 200 residents from the community. The meetings included a community survey and panel discussion that identified citizens' issues and concerns. Six focus groups were formed to address the key issues identified from the community survey. The focus groups were comprised of youth, residents, business owners, senior citizens, faith based and service agencies.

Quantitative and qualitative reports were compiled based on data collected from these groups. The core issues identified by participants were:

- safety
- economic development

These core issues coincide with the four key federal components as identified by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

In the area of law enforcement our efforts are targeted to address crime trends identified in our community. Key areas of concern are: drug trafficking and associated drug related crime that includes adult and juvenile offenders. Funded programs such as Operation Trigger Lock, Saturation Patrols, Juvenile Curfew and Probation Ride Along programs have helped reduce crime in these areas. In addition to continuing these efforts we have opened a neighborhood police substation and have used funding to continue and expand its operation.

Proposed Outcome

Our goal through these efforts over the next five years is to reduce reported crimes in the target area by an additional 10% over the current 25% reduction.

Measure

We will develop a customized data base for collection of statistics and success will be measured by an annual 3% reduction in crime from the 2008 rate. This program will be reviewed on an annual basis and implementation will be adjusted accordingly the following year.

COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing plays a priority role in addressing the core safety issues identified by residents. While we were successful in reducing crime in our downtown area, the drug trafficking, prostitution, juvenile mischief, and other drug related crimes spread into our neighborhoods. Silent Complaint Forms, Neighborhood Watch Groups and Community Oriented Policing have been established to address these issues. Our current neighborhood watch groups have been instrumental in mobilizing residents' participation in National Night Out, block parties, and door-to-door canvassing activities to create awareness and prevention of

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crime in our neighborhoods. Our intent is to expand our Community Oriented Policing efforts, promote awareness of the non emergency phone number and provide training on the proper use of this number, increase the number of citizens involved in neighborhood watch groups by 10% per year and/or add one additional neighborhood watch group over the next 5 years, and hold one informational seminar per year pertaining to community issues such as a Citizens' Police Academy, landlord tenant relations and code enforcement.

(Maybe flip outcome position)

Proposed Outcome (1)

We propose to produce a 10% reduction of blighted properties through activities to promote an understanding of code enforcement and landlord tenant relations.

Measure (1)

We will develop a customized data base for collection of statistics and success will be measured by an annual 2.5% reduction in blighted properties from the 2009 rate. This program will be reviewed on an annual basis and implementation will be adjusted accordingly the following year.

Proposed Outcome (2)

We propose a 10% increase in reported criminal activities through the development of programs such as Citizens' Police Academies.

Measure (2)

We will develop a customized data base for collection of statistics; success will be measured by an annual 2% increase (from the 2008 rate) in reporting criminal activities in the target area. This program will be reviewed on an annual basis and implementation will be adjusted accordingly the following year.

PREVENTION/INTERVENTION/TREATMENT

To achieve our goals in reducing crime and revitalizing our community we feel it necessary to engage prevention, intervention and treatment programs that address root causes of societal ills. Current programs include after school programs that provide safe havens such as: Healthy Kids and the Positive Action Center through Communities That Care. Adult literacy, job readiness skills, internships, and community service opportunities are also offered through the Weed and Seed program and its partners. Identified core issues to be addressed are parenting and mentoring programs through community partners.

Proposed Outcome (1)

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We propose a 20% reduction of city curfew violations over a five year period by educating parents about the value of our existing curfew program.

Measure (1)

We will develop a customized data base for collection of statistics and success will be measured by an annual 4% reduction in curfew violations from the 2008 rate. This program will be reviewed on an annual basis and implementation will be adjusted accordingly the following year.

Proposed Outcome (2)

We propose an increase of employment ready adults over a five year period.

Measure (2)

We will develop a customized data base for collection of statistics and will establish a base line. Success will be measured by an annual 5% increase in employment ready adults. This program will be reviewed on an annual basis and implementation will be adjusted accordingly the following year.

NEIGHBORHOOD RESTORATION

Our Seeding efforts will focus on neighborhood restoration and economic development. In the area of neighborhood restoration, our joint community efforts have already resulted in the demolition of many blighted properties. This was a key step in moving toward improved economic development and neighborhood restoration. By providing site-ready properties we have already attracted one new international business. In addition, the Westmoreland County Community College New Kensington Center has relocated into our downtown target area. This state of the art, six million dollar college facility has already experienced a 32% enrollment increase since its opening in January 2009.

Other foundational elements for our economic revitalization include the collection of signatures and letters of support for a commuter train to Pittsburgh. We are now one of two transportation initiatives on which final feasibility studies are being completed. Additionally, we have received a twenty-five thousand dollar grant to develop a plan and apply for Elm Street designation.

Projects of our economic development committee include: a public relations CD, community newsletter, a web enabled real estate database and a web site created to help improve the perception of our community and attract new businesses. We did this through partnerships with state, county, and local officials, as well as chambers of commerce, local agencies and economic development groups.

Our intent is to organize beautification efforts, increase cultural activities, increase coordinated community activities, and establish specific partnerships with economic development, training

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and business professionals. We will do this by having one community wide clean up day per year, organizing a community holiday parade, coordinating one training session per year to address economic development and entrepreneurial needs, and partnering with regional groups to bring one cultural activity per year to the community. These activities will expand the economic vitality of the community, resulting in less crime.

Proposed Outcome

We propose to assist other community agencies in attracting new businesses which provide an additional 15 family sustaining jobs over the next 5 years.

Measure

We will develop a customized data base for collection of statistics and success will be measured by the attraction of new businesses which provide a total of 15 family sustaining jobs by the end of five years. This program will be reviewed on an annual basis and implementation will be adjusted accordingly the following year.

This plan, together with funding, partnerships and collaborations, will enable the City of New Kensington to realize its dream of once again becoming a vibrant prosperous community where businesses thrive and family filled neighborhoods flourish.