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Together at Our Best

Avalon, Bellevue, Ben Avon, and Ben Avon Heights are some of the Pittsburgh area’s most unique inner-ring of suburbs. During the steel industry, these communities were utilized as summer retreats. The four communities’ natural and man-made beauty is evoked in their names. “Avalon” derives from the Welsh name of a legendary island in the tales of King Arthur, an “island of apple trees.” “Bellevue” is French for “beautiful view.” “Ben Avon” and “Ben Avon Heights” share their names with a mountain in the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland, with “ben avon” translating to “hill of the waters.”

They are best characterized by the aesthetically pleasing historic homes lining their streets, bustling business districts, beautiful natural scenery, and a convenient central location just beyond the City of Pittsburgh’s limits. Throughout the years, these communities remained attractive places to live, work, and play with their “suburban streetcar” atmosphere. While there are signs of population loss, shrinking tax bases, and shifting demographics, a number of assets remain that could lead to unequivocal opportunities for revival. This comprehensive plan aims to identify those assets and opportunities for Avalon, Bellevue, Ben Avon, and Ben Avon Heights while keeping in mind potential challenges.

Several building blocks are necessary to bring out the best in each community. This plan includes creative and innovative strategies and recommendations and coordinates them with each other; with local, county, and state requirements; and with the plans and projects of neighboring communities. Comprehensive plans cover a range of traditional planning topics (e.g., land use, transportation, housing, natural resources, economic development, community facilities, natural hazards, etc.) as well as topics that address contemporary planning needs (e.g., public health, social equity, sustainability, etc.). This Plan will address the interrelationships among these various topics. It frames proposals as sets of mutually reinforced actions in a systems approach linking the plan with public programs and regulations. It contains creative strategies for dealing with community change, uncertainty, development needs, and proposes new approaches and solutions to community problems. It honors the region’s history while setting the stage for expanding opportunities by leveraging the many social, economic, historic, and environmental assets of all four communities.
Planning Process – What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a living guide of goals, policies, and actions that shape the direction of a community’s preservation and development. The plan defines and documents visions and aspirations and outlines a road map to assist the community in making decisions about its future. While there is no weight of law and no rules or regulations, the vision outlined in the plan can prompt examination of regulatory guidelines to ensure compliance with stated goals and actions.

It is broad in scope, examining the existing physical, social, and economic characteristics, and seeks to apply this knowledge to the future. It speaks to various issues in general terms, but it also makes specific recommendations. The comprehensive plan is, in part, a factual report that examines how the past has led to the present, as well as a report that can be used to chart the path into the future.

In preparing a plan, studies must be conducted on various subjects, including existing conditions within the community and prospects for future growth. Usually, such studies include history, existing land use, transportation and circulation, community facilities, socio-economic analyses, natural features, population, and housing.

This comprehensive plan is the product of the combined efforts of community residents and partners, the Joint Planning Commission, a Steering Committee, Municipal Staff and Elected Officials and lays out a framework for the communities’ future and continued successes in the long-term.

A comprehensive plan:
• is both a document and a process
• is a public policy guide for big-picture thinking about what makes a place to live and work actually a community
• helps the community prepare for and manage population and business development patterns
• helps the community plan for and coordinate major public investments.
Throughout all four Boroughs, there is a significant presence of both architectural character and an integrated system of natural resources. The business districts of Bellevue, Avalon, and Ben Avon contain qualities of a livable built environment. Similarly, the abundant presence of green space in Ben Avon Heights, Ben Avon, and Avalon make it easier to blend the amenities of the natural world with the desire for healthy communities.

Also, the location of the four Boroughs is an asset. These centrally located communities enjoy convenient access to numerous opportunities for employment and amenities. Ben Avon, Avalon, and Bellevue are situated along Route 65 - one of the Pittsburgh region’s primary arterial routes and an important connector to Beaver County. Ben Avon Heights is strategically located with access to Interstate 279 (Parkway North) and Route 65. Excluding complications of certain rush hours, all of the communities are within a 20-minute drive to Pittsburgh’s two main employment centers, Downtown and Oakland. Additionally, Cranberry Township, the ever-growing employment hub at the Butler-Allegheny County line, is easily accessible via Interstate 79.

The communities’ changing demographics and the increasing influence of economics, both regional and nationally, are factors that inevitably contribute in the life-cycle of any community. In short, change is driven by internal factors such as evolution of businesses and employers, resident attitudes and desires, or shifts in governance/administration. Change is, also, driven by external factors, such as transportation
corridors, demographic shifts, changing technologies, and policy changes at the county, state, and federal level. All of these factors dictate the manner in which a community provides services to businesses and residents. Depending on the reaction, change can help a community to progress.

Five foundations, as developed through the exploration and evaluation of planning ideas across the United States, offer some guidance as the Avalon, Bellevue, Ben Avon, and Ben Avon Heights communities move toward an economically-, environmentally-, and socially-sustainable future. Excerpts of these findings include:

1. Livable Built Environment

Communities are inherently responsible for ensuring that elements of the built environment - including land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure are able to work together to provide sustainable places with a high quality of life. The four Boroughs are shaped largely by their existing, intricate street network. A plan for multi-modal transportation allows residents to use a variety of transportation modes - including walking, biking, mobility chairs, and transit - and reduces dependence on automobiles. This results in a decreased need for additional parking, alleviating already crowded streets, and opens up valuable land for new development and investment. Multi-modal transportation also encourages more physical activity, improving health outcomes, and increases the mobility of those who are unable or unwilling to drive (e.g., children, people with disabilities, and seniors). A foundation stone of the communities’ successes is its vicinity and access to mass transit service. As part of efforts with Allegheny County, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, and PennDOT, the four Boroughs can continue to collectively coordinate regional-scale transportation investments to foster both transportation efficiency and economic development. This is important for creating and improving access to employment opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged populations without easy access to personal automobiles.
A system of “complete streets” that serves multiple functions is increasingly important in community planning and encourages the sense of community that has been lost in many places throughout the years. Complete streets are rights-of-ways which are designed and operated with all users in mind (motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit riders of all ages and abilities) in order to support a multi-modal transportation system. A complete street network is one that safely and conveniently accommodates all users and desired functions, though not necessarily at equal priority. Streets that serve multiple functions are able to accommodate travel, social interaction, and commerce, to provide for more vibrant neighborhoods and more livable communities.

As a whole, they possess a mixed land use pattern that is walkable and bike-able. Mixed land use patterns are characterized by residential and nonresidential land uses, located in close proximity to one another. Mixing land uses and providing housing in close proximity to everyday destinations (e.g., shops, schools, civic spaces, and workplaces) can help to keep investments in the community, encourage residents to shop locally, and reduce the need to drive. Mixed land use patterns that incorporate safe, convenient, accessible, and attractive design features (e.g., sidewalks, bike street furniture, bicycle facilities, and street trees) encourage livability and a sense of place.

Infill development remains a significant influence in the quality of the communities’ built environment. Infill is characterized by development or redevelopment (introducing a different use on a formerly developed lot) of underutilized parcels of land in otherwise built-up areas, which are served by or have ready access to existing infrastructure and services. Focusing development and redevelopment on infill sites takes advantage of this existing infrastructure. With great “bones” already in place and an attractive building stock, infill can help to clean up areas of blight, abandonment, or vacancy and help the Boroughs move towards their potentials.

There is, also, opportunity to encourage design standards appropriate to the historic and existing context. Design standards are specific criteria and requirements for the form and appearance of development within a neighborhood, corridor, special

serve to improve or protect both the function and aesthetic appeal of a community. Design standards typically address building placement, building massing and materials, and the location and appearance of elements (such as landscaping, signage, and street furniture). They encourage development that is compatible with the community context, which enhances the sense of place. While design standards are not specified in a comprehensive plan itself, this plan aims to establish the direction and objectives that detailed standards can achieve.

Where opportunity exists, the communities can conserve and reuse historic resources. Historic resources are buildings, sites, landmarks, or districts with exceptional value or quality for illustrating the cultural heritage of a community. They can include resources eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or other inventory of historic resources in association with a program such as the Main Street Program. It is important to address the conservation and reuse of historic resources as it can enhance a community’s sense of place, economy (through tourism and other economic activity), and environment (by reducing the need to construct new buildings that consume land and resources).

Public facilities play an important role in communities, and they should be able to accommodate persons of all ages and abilities. This is especially significant in Avalon and Bellevue, both having 20% of the population with identified disabilities. Public facilities should be located and designed for safety, served by
different transportation modes, equitably distributed throughout the community, and accessible to visitors with mobility impairments.

As technologies continue to advance, the communities have the opportunity to implement policies that encourage green building design and energy conservation. A green building is characterized by design features that, if used as intended, will minimize the environmental impacts of the building over the course of its lifespan. The goals of innovative building design are energy and resource efficiency, waste reduction and pollution prevention, and occupant health and productivity. Energy conservation refers to reducing energy consumption through energy efficiency, right-sized or behavioral change. Green building designs that meet the standards of the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or similar rating system are energy- and resource-efficient, reduce waste and pollution, and improve occupant health and productivity. Together these approaches reduce energy costs and improve environmental quality and community health. They can be implemented through strategies such as code requirements, regulatory incentives, and investment programs (e.g., grants to homeowners for weatherization of their homes). Further, efficiency can be realized in working together and with neighboring municipalities to realize positive change.

2. Harmony with Nature

There is an opportunity to align the contributions of natural habits with human well-being, so that maintaining health is a primary objective of the communities. Natural habitats are areas or landscapes, such as riparian corridors and woodlands inhabited by a species or community of species, and can include those designated as rare and endangered. Sensitive lands, including steep slopes and geologically unstable areas (often locally called redbeds) contain natural features that are environmentally significant and easily disturbed by human activity. These resources provide important environmental benefits and opportunity to restore, connect, and protect natural habitats and sensitive lands. Restoring degraded habitats can reestablish natural diversity and associated ecosystem services. Expanding the scale of responsible building brings about the opportunity to plan for the provision and protection of green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is a strategically planned and managed network of green open spaces, including parks, greenways, and protected lands. Green infrastructure may also be defined as features that use natural topography and vegetation to capture, store, and infiltrate stormwater runoff, often in urban settings. This includes features such as bioswales, rain gardens, and green roofs. Green infrastructure provides a range of critical functions and ecosystem services to communities, such as wildlife habitat, stormwater management, and recreational opportunities.

The communities continue to encourage development that respects natural topography. Sensitive natural topography includes features such as hillsides, ridges, steep slopes, or lowlands that can pose challenges to development. Taking these features into account when planning for private development and public infrastructure can reduce construction costs, minimize natural hazard risks from flooding or landslides, and mitigate the impacts of construction on natural resources, including soils, vegetation, and water systems.

More communities are enacting policies to reduce carbon footprints. The term “carbon footprint” is used to describe the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted by a given entity (such as an individual, company, or community) in a certain time frame. It provides a measure of the environmental impact of a particular lifestyle or operation, and encompasses both the direct consumption of fossil fuels as well as indirect emissions associated with the manufacture and transport of all goods and services the entity consumes. Policies designed to reduce the carbon footprint benefit the environment and have associated benefits on air quality and health. Because these policies are often associated with energy conservation, they can also have positive economic benefits for local governments and community members.

The communities can promote compliance with state and local air quality standards. Air quality standards are limits on the quantity of pollutants in the air during
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a given period in a defined area. Under the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has established air quality standards for ground-level ozone, lead, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide to protect public health and the environment and enforced by state and local governments. Pollutants may come from mobile sources (e.g., cars and trucks), area sources (e.g., small businesses), or point sources (e.g., production facilities).

Renewable energy sources, which are derived directly or indirectly from the sun or natural movements and mechanisms of the environment including solar, wind, biomass and hydropower, are naturally regenerated over a short timescale and do not diminish. Municipal cooperation throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania in the early part of this decade has provided successful and vetted policies through the U.S. Department of Energy’s Sunshot Initiative. This effort frames technical provisions for solar power technologies and zoning. The communities have the ability to adopt these provisions and be pro-actively prepared for this type of use.

It is highly encouraged to further realize physical and fiscal efficiencies related to solid waste and recycling. Solid waste is refuse resulting from human activities. It can include food scraps, yard waste, packaging materials, broken or discarded household items, and construction and demolition debris. Many common solid waste items - such as glass, aluminum and other metals, paper and cardboard, certain plastics, and food scraps and other organic materials - can be diverted from the waste stream and recycled into new products or composted.

The protection and management of streams, watersheds, and floodplains is imperative throughout the region. A watershed is an area of land drained by a river, river system, or other body of water. A floodplain is an area of low-lying ground adjacent to a body of water that is susceptible to inundation. These resources have typically been extensively altered in urban environments - for example, by replacing streams with underground culverts or constructing buildings in the floodplain - negatively affecting the natural and beneficial functions they provide. Watershed management is important for protection of water supply, water quality, drainage, stormwater runoff and other functions at a watershed scale.
3. Resilient Economy

Avalon, Bellevue, Ben Avon, and Ben Avon Heights are prepared to deal with both positive and negative changes to their economic health and initiate sustainable urban infill and redevelopment strategies that foster green business growth and build reliance on local assets.

They aim to provide the physical capacity for economic growth. Economic growth is characterized by an increase in the amounts of goods and services that an economy is able to produce over time. Providing the physical capacity for economic growth means ensuring that adequate space will be available for commercial and industrial development and redevelopment for nonresidential land uses. The communities are planning for the necessary amount of land and structures appropriately built, sized, and located to support existing and future services based on current and projected economic conditions. This could entail decline as well as growth in demand depending on market conditions and as certain economic sectors become obsolete.

Planning means balancing a land use mix for fiscal sustainability. A balanced land use mix for fiscal sustainability is characterized by a pattern that includes both residential and nonresidential uses, such that the long-term cost of providing a desirable level of public services to residents, business owners, and visitors is closely matched to the tax or user-fee revenue generated by those uses.

Plans should ensure that areas with these areas are accessible to employees via one or more travel modes (automobile, transit, bicycling, walking). This is important for improving access to employment opportunities, particularly among populations that may not have personal vehicles. Continued discussions with Port Authority can help ensure transportation access to employment centers.

Promotion of green business is possible. A green business is any business offering environmentally friendly products and services through sustainable business models and practices. Green jobs are
provided by agricultural, manufacturing, research and development, administrative, service, or other business activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. Green businesses and jobs may include, but are not limited to, those associated with production and/or supporting materials/services.

Community-based economic development is key to the communities’ health and, development that promotes, supports, and invests in businesses that serve local needs and are compatible with the vision, character, and cultural values of the community. This approach encourages the use of local resources in ways that enhance economic opportunities while improving social conditions and supporting locally owned and produced goods and services. These activities foster connections and a sense of place, reduce the need for imports, and stimulate the local economy. This in turn can increase investment and revitalization of downtowns, commercial areas, neighborhoods, and other place-based community resources.

Infrastructure capacity is kept in line with demand by appropriately sizing structures and networks to adequately serve existing and future development. This is important in balancing quality of service provision with costs to the local government. Infrastructure planning may include decommissioning or realigning infrastructure in neighborhoods experiencing protracted population decline. For example, facilitating a transition from residential uses to green infrastructure, urban agriculture, or renewable energy production.

A range of housing types is characterized by the presence of residential units of different sizes, configurations, tenures, and price points located in buildings of different sizes, configurations, ages, and ownership structures. Providing a range of housing types accommodates varying lifestyle choices and affordability needs and makes it possible for households of different sizes and income levels to live in close proximity to one another. A jobs/housing balance is characterized by a proportion of residential and non-residential land uses. A strong jobs/housing balance can also result in jobs that are better matched to the labor force, improved worker productivity, and higher overall quality of life. When coordinated with multi-modal transportation investments, it improves access to employment opportunities for disadvantaged populations.

In general planning terms, at-risk neighborhoods experience falling property values, high real estate foreclosure rates, rapid depopulation, and physical deterioration. Distressed neighborhoods suffer from disinvestment and physical deterioration for many reasons, including (but not limited to) the existence of low investment lands on the urban fringe, the financial burdens of maintaining an aging building stock, economic restructuring, land speculation, and the dissolution or relocation of anchor institutions. A disadvantaged neighborhood is a neighborhood in which residents have reduced access to resources and capital due to factors such as high levels of poverty and unemployment and low levels of educational attainment. These neighborhoods often exhibit high rates of both physical disorder (e.g., abandoned buildings, graffiti, vandalism, litter, disrepair) and social disorder (e.g., crime, violence, loitering, drinking and drug use).

An at-risk population is characterized by vulnerability to health or safety impacts through factors such as race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, gender, age, behavior, or disability status. These populations may have additional needs before, during, and after a destabilizing event. These events include: natural or human-made disasters, periods of extreme weather, indefinite periods of localized instability related to an economic downturn, or periods of social turmoil. At-risk populations include children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, those living in institutionalized settings, those with limited English proficiency, and those who are transportation disadvantaged.

Throughout the past decade, the Boroughs have, to the greatest extent possible, developed their policies to minimize any impacts that run with the above risks and disinvestments. Enforcement aids in minimizing the above risks as well.

The communities provide accessible and quality public services and facilities to all residents. A public service is a service performed for the benefit of the people who live in (and sometimes those who visit)
Together At Our Best

the municipalities. A public facility is any building or property—such as a library, park, or community center—owned, leased, or funded by a public entity. Public services, facilities and businesses and institutions for health care should be located so safe and convenient transportation options can reach quality services and facilities that meet or exceed industry standards for service provision. Upgrades to infrastructure and facilities in older and substandard areas are significant and necessary changes. Infrastructure comprises the physical systems that allow societies and economies to function. These include: water mains, storm and sanitary sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications facilities, and transportation facilities such as bridges, tunnels, and roadways. Upgrading is the process of improving these infrastructure and facilities through the addition or replacement of existing components with newer versions. An older area is a neighborhood, corridor, or district that has been developed, but continuously occupied for multiple decades. A substandard area is a neighborhood, district, or corridor with infrastructure that fails to meet established standards.

Workforce diversity is characterized by the employment of a wide variety of people in terms of age, cultural background, physical ability, race and ethnicity, religion, and gender identity. Workforce development is an economic development strategy that focuses on people rather than businesses. It attempts to enhance a region’s economic stability and prosperity by developing jobs that match existing skills within the local workforce or training workers to meet the labor needs of local industries.

4. Healthy Community

Public health needs are recognized and addressed through provisions for healthy foods, physical activity, access to recreation, health care, environmental justice, and safe neighborhoods. Public safety involves prevention of and protection from events such as crimes or disasters that could bring danger, injury, or damage to the general public. Although addressing crime is typically considered a governmental responsibility (police, fire, and emergency services), it can also be reduced using crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles.

A healthy lifestyle can be characterized by individual practices and behavioral choices that enhance health and well-being. Barriers to the design of the physical environment can influence rates of physical activity and health benefits. Active transportation facilities (e.g., sidewalks and bike lanes) and accessible, equitably distributed recreational opportunities support physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Parks are areas of land—often in a natural state or improved with facilities for rest and recreation—set aside for the public’s use and enjoyment. Greenways are strips of undeveloped land that provide corridors for environmental and recreational use and connect areas of open space. These facilities offer a range of benefits to residents, including opportunities for increased physical activity. The proximity of parks to neighborhoods supports increased physical activity among residents; however, social and environmental impediments such as crime, unsafe pedestrian conditions, and noxious land uses may decrease accessibility and subsequent use of these facilities.

A lack of access to fresh, healthy foods contributes to obesity and negative health outcomes. In many urban areas, residents face difficulties in buying affordable or good-quality fresh food, a situation commonly referred to as a “food desert.” Healthy foods include those that are fresh or minimally processed, naturally dense in nutrients, and low in fat, sodium, and cholesterol. Locally grown goods are those produced in close proximity to consumers in terms of both geographic distance and the supply chain. Though there is no standard definition of locally grown, sources can range from backyards and community gardens to farms within the region or state.
Equitable access ensures services and facilities are reachable by all persons, regardless of social or economic background. Healthcare providers are those individuals, institutions, or agencies that provide healthcare services to consumers. Schools are institutions that provide education or instruction. Public safety facilities provide safety and emergency services to a community, including police and fire protection. Arts and cultural facilities provide programs and activities related to the arts and culture, including performing arts centers, concert halls, museums, galleries, and other related facilities.

5. Responsible Regionalism

Coordination of local land use planning and regional transportation investments can result in an improved transportation network. These projects include investments in highways, streets, public transit, and pedestrian/bicycle systems.

The four communities can explore housing in context of a balanced plan to depict desirable future locations or conditions for parks, greenways, protected lands, and other types of green infrastructure within a multi-jurisdictional area. Coordinating local open space plans with green infrastructure plans can maximize both the ecological and public benefits that green infrastructure provides and can help leverage investment in parks, greenways, trails, and other green infrastructure projects.

As centrally-located communities in the Pittsburgh region, the four Boroughs have the opportunity to work with other neighboring municipalities on a variety of issues. This can include municipal promotion, park and trail development, transportation, and economic development. They already have experience in this process through their parks (e.g., Avonworth Community Park, Avon Park, and Bellevue Memorial Park). Bellevue is also an active member of Allegheny County Economic Development’s Allegheny Together program. Expanding cooperation to include other realms of interest can provide other benefits in community promotion, cost savings, and shared services that may not be readily apparent yet.

6. Sustainability and Resiliency

Sustainability is the practice of meeting the ecological, human and economic needs without compromising the ability, health and vitality of future generations to meet their own needs. Communities across the nation are increasingly using aspects of the United States Green Building Council’s LEED - Neighborhood Development (LEED ND) to market communities and to guide development and redevelopment efforts. LEED ND criteria highlight many fundamental characteristics inherent to the forms and functions of Avalon, Bellevue, Ben Avon and Ben Avon Heights. The municipalities are encouraged to reference and infuse the characteristics of LEED ND and follow the most current version of LEED ND criteria in context of preserving the communities’ desirable characters and quality of life. The following areas of focus earn credit toward certification:

- Walkable Streets
- Compact Development
- Diverse Housing Types and Affordability
- Connected and Open Community
- Mixed Use Neighborhoods
- Reduced Parking Footprint
- Transit Facilities
- Access to Civic and Public Space
- Access to Recreation Facilities
- Community Outreach and Involvement

In considering these criteria as part of the municipalities’ future development and redevelopment efforts, the Boroughs will be able to increase their resiliency to undesirable changes. A definition of resiliency often referenced in planning is “the ability of a community to prepare for anticipated hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions” (National Insititute of Standards and Technology). Further, when considering the municipalities’ aging infrastructure and needs to fulfill public services, the strategies in place will help maintain the communities’ vitality.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Key Trends

As of the 2010 Census, the four Boroughs had a combined population of 15,227 (totaling 16,373 in 2000, for a decline of 7%). Bellevue experienced the lowest decline by percentage, at -4.6%, while Avalon had the highest percentage loss, at -11.1%. Since the 1970s, population loss by percentage in these areas has outpaced that of Allegheny County. These areas lost 30% of their combined population between the 1970 and 2010 Censuses. The US Census estimates incremental population loss (8,972) continued to occur between 2015 and 2016 in the Pittsburgh Metro region.

However, demographic projections from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) suggest that by 2040 the population will increase 8% from 2010 figures, to a level slightly higher than the figure from the year 2000 in all four communities. Bellevue is also projected for significant growth in percentage and numbers.

According to 2010 Census figures, Avalon had the greatest proportion of residents over the age of 65, though Ben Avon Heights had the oldest population by

Bellevue had the lowest median age (by a margin of almost 2 years) at 37.2. The borough also had a lower median age than that of the Pittsburgh metropolitan area as a whole by more than 5 years. In fact, the borough in 2010 was the ninth youngest municipality in Allegheny County out of 130 total municipalities, trailed by Rankin (30.9), Pittsburgh (33.2), Braddock (34.9), East Pittsburgh (35.6), Mount Oliver (36.2), Dormont (36.4), Duquesne (36.4), and Wilmerding (36.9). With the exception of the City of Pittsburgh.
and Dormont (a community of similar economic momentum, population and building density, demographic makeup, age of housing, commercial district makeup, and distance from Downtown Pittsburgh), all of the municipalities with younger median ages had significantly lower median incomes than Bellevue. The areas that were slightly older in median age fall largely into three categories:

- fast-growing newer suburban communities of upper-middle-income families: North Fayette Township (38.2), Ohio Township, (38.2), Pine Township (38.8)
- up-and-coming inner-ring communities: Millvale (37.5), Swissvale (39.0), Aspinwall (39.6)
- a condominium community home to many young professionals: Pennsbury Village (38.7)

Together with the fact that Bellevue’s median age increased by 0.7 years between 2000 and 2010, the demographic makeup for Bellevue may be interpreted as positive. The borough is in a good position to continue attracting investment and young, educated professionals based on these trends, as well as on the presence of an attractive historic housing stock and walkable business district, and an inner-ring location. Certain strategies may be undertaken to make the borough an even bigger draw for this cohort of individuals, who on both a national and local level increasingly chose walkable, bike-able communities with character and charm that are closer to the central city.

As of 2010, Ben Avon was also younger than the vast majority of Allegheny County communities. Its median age of 39.2 falls in line with those of other inner-ring communities with attractive historic housing stock, such as Emsworth (38.7), Swissvale, Aspinwall, Crafton (40.7), and Edgewood (40.8). The borough and neighboring Ben Avon Heights enjoy a high homeownership rate and mortgaged homeownership percentage. Per the 2010 Census, an above-average household size was characteristic of these two communities, at 2.40 and 2.80 persons per household, respectively. This indicates that the communities are attractive places for families.

Despite smaller household sizes, Avalon and Bellevue have a relatively high population density compared to the rest of the Pittsburgh area, approximately 6,721 and 7,609 people per square mile. Despite Avalon being the second oldest of the four Boroughs in median age, at 43.1—which is only slightly younger than Ben Avon Heights’ median of 43.8—the community has the largest percentage of a population enrolled in college or graduate school, at 8.5%, estimated by 2010-2014 American Community Survey. This is a full 45.7% of the Borough’s residents estimated at being enrolled in school. Bellevue also has a large number cohort of individuals enrolled in higher education, at 7.6% of the population (accounting for 37.2% of the residents enrolled in school).

Median household income grew slower in Avalon and Bellevue between 1999 and 2014 than in the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County as a whole. These median figures also grew slower than the rate of inflation. This means that residents experienced a decrease in spending power over those years.

The median household incomes of Ben Avon, and Ben Avon Heights, meanwhile, grew quickly in the same time period than in the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County as a whole. Ben Avon Heights’ median income kept up with the rate of inflation, while Ben Avon’s surpassed the inflation rate by a significant percentage (though not as much as in fast-growing neighbor Ohio Township).

Per capita income in both Avalon and Bellevue are lower than in Allegheny County as a whole, while those in Ben Avon, and Ben Avon Heights are much higher. Per capita income in Ben Avon Heights is actually over double that of Allegheny County as a whole.
Key Trends Partners and Other Local Organizations

Partnerships are a key component of realizing possibilities in the years ahead. The Northgate School District and Avonworth School District are student-centered. Strengthening partnerships in years to come can yield, meaningful communications between the municipalities, and the school districts can help foster a deeper sense of pride and responsibility toward the broader community.

Other possible key partners / local organizations include:

- Northgate School District
- Avonworth School District
- Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC)
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC)
- North Area Environmental Council (NAEC)
- Holy Family Institute
- Bidwell Training Center
- Allegheny General Hospital Suburban
  (outpatient care facility)
- Numerous centers of worship

The following mapping illustrates patterns and influences that are important to understanding the extent to which changes in policies or projects may be compatible with established development.
These maps have been created using Geographic Information System data provided by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.
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LEGEND

- Major Employers

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

JOINT PLANNING COMMISSION
CHAPTER 3: THE PROCESS

Planning Approach & Process

The beginning of 2015 marked the first step towards re-examining and expanding joint municipal collaborative, as the process of understanding background information, demographics, physical infrastructure, and relating planning efforts began. Over the course of several months, the members of the Steering Committee representing all four Boroughs diligently worked through background information to gain a broad understanding of the factors that are influencing each community.

Towards the end of 2015 and early 2016, the Steering Committees turned their attention to the future and began defining achievable recommendations. All of the goals, strategies, and initiatives of this plan were informed by dialogue among the planning team, the public, and the stakeholders throughout the Boroughs.
Community Engagement

The first outreach effort was the Touch-a-Truck event, in which residents explained their most basic thoughts of the community - what they liked, what could be improved.

Throughout the summer of 2015, public input was solicited through public outreach events like the Apple Blossom Festival, an event cherished by all community members. There, side-by-side, community members shared what they loved most about their community, what they would like to see more of, and aspects of the Boroughs they felt should be amplified.

Additionally, there were ads in the local paper allowing residents to write in their thoughts about the communities. Responding residents expressed content with their communities and that there are no pressing issues throughout all four Boroughs.
Streets flanked with green