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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For generations, the Monongahela (Mon) Valley, which includes communities along the Monongahela River and its tributaries, was the economic engine that drove the Pittsburgh economy with its manufacturing and steel making enterprises. In almost every case, the location of these industries in the mid-19th century was on alluvial flat land adjacent to the rivers, and new towns for their workers grew street by street up the hillsides. The majority of workers were immigrants, mostly from Europe, but also from the American south; they brought their languages, religions, and ways of life with them. Each town had its main street, churches, schools, park, library, and local government. But, in the late 1970s



and early 1980s, US Steel, J & L Steel Company, Westinghouse Electric, Westinghouse Air Brake Company (WABCO), ALCOA, Union Switch and Signal, and Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel all closed major manufacturing plants in the Mon Valley, and in the wake of these closings innumerable small workshops and service industries shut down as well. Sources indicate that as many as 175,000 industrial and manufacturing jobs were lost in the region in the late 70's and early 80s when these industries closed. Not only were the incomes of thousand of families shut off, but so too were intergenerational traditions and pride and hope.

Each of these towns had its own local elected government, and its own schools, churches and other institutions. The industrial sites occupied hundreds of acres of land, and as landowners, the corporations were major taxpayers. Linking the sites were railroads, roads and bridges along busy waterways. When the industries closed down the clean up of brownfield sites and infrastructures were left, in many cases, for local governments and their communities to address. Most of the towns were left

with empty industrial land between themselves and the rivers. Without jobs or futures, younger families migrated, while older workers took pensions and social security and one by one died out. Churches lost their congregations and local ethnic cultures and pride languished.

As a result, the population in the communities declined from an estimated high of about 380,000 to the current estimation of 294,000, a loss of close to 100,000 people. But these figures mask much of the true story. Many of the towns in the Mon Valley were disproportionately affected by the economic downturn: communities like Braddock, Clairton, Duquesne, East Pittsburgh, Homestead, Rankin, Wall, and Wilmerding lost over two thirds of their population. These dramatic population losses directly affected the vacancy and abandonment rates of housing stock in the Mon Valley. By 2010, it was estimated that over 12,000 residential properties were vacant in the Mon Valley communities.

But within these communities other dramatic changes occurred. Traditional main streets have sequences of empty store fronts. With the out-migration of younger families and the demise of older families, vacant owner-occupied properties were acquired by absentee landlords under Section 8 and

leased as rentals to lower income in-migrants who were not property owners and thus tended to lack basic civic commitment. The low-income rentals are not balanced by new home sales and home ownership which might stabilize the futures of families, with the result that poverty has tended to be locked in. Many renters in the Mon Valley communities are single parent households; unemployment and part-time employment figures are high; and educational achievement in the public schools has declined dramatically. The results have been rising rates of drugs, gangs, and teenage crime.

In Wilkesburg alone there are about 1,500 vacant properties and another 1,400 in the City of McKeesport. Many of the vacant properties are blighted, unsafe, and uninhabitable, further destabilizing the neighborhoods around them and weakening the housing market. In many cases, the taxes and liens owed on such properties far exceed their value and make them impossible to sell; property owners or heirs simply walk away, leaving local communities to deal with these problems on a case by case basis. In an article in September 2011, the Pittsburgh Post Gazette observed that “the municipalities carrying the biggest burden of vacant and abandoned property are among the most economically fragile in the region and the least likely to have the resources at hand to do something about it.”¹

PATHS TOWARD SOLUTIONS

Although the problem is huge, there are clear paths for moving forward. One of these is that the towns in the Mon Valley still exist as towns. There remains strong local identity. Democratically elected local jurisdictions are still functioning. On the one hand, the extreme problem presented by the existence of large amounts of vacant, blighted, and abandoned properties in the Mon Valley indicates a need to address the problem on a regional basis. On the other hand, the vehicles for addressing the problem have to be at the scale of local jurisdictions. For this reason, three Allegheny County COGs (COGs) are determined to bring a regional attention and focus to this issue unlike any effort that has been attempted in the past.

STEEL VALLEY COGs (SVCOG)

Established in 1973, the Steel Valley COGs (SVCOG) is a non-profit organization representing municipalities in the Mon Valley region of Allegheny County. The SVCOG’s member municipalities include the boroughs of Braddock Hills, Dravosburg, Homestead, Munhall, West Elizabeth, West Homestead, West Mifflin, and Whitaker, and the city of Clairton. The SVCOG is governed by a Board of elected official from its member municipalities and it has a full time director and staff. The SVCOG works with its communities through a variety of programs



¹ “Look at Vacant Property as an Opportunity,” Pittsburgh Post Gazette, Sunday, September 25, 2011.

including community and economic revitalization, community development block grant projects, cooperative purchasing, geographic information systems (GIS), human services, joint public works, and public safety services. The SVCOG works cooperatively with many groups and organizations to fulfill its duties. **The SVCOG communities, the hardest hit in the Mon Valley, have lost 27,000 people or 36% of their population since 1950. They have approximately 2,500 vacant properties.**

TURTLE CREEK VALLEY COGS (TCVCOG)

Established in 1971, the Turtle Creek Valley COG (TCVCOG) is a non-profit organization that facilitates multi-municipal efforts and implements efficient, cost-effective programs on behalf of its members. Currently, twenty municipalities are members and enjoy the benefits of working cooperatively and sharing services. The current members include the boroughs of Braddock, Chalfant, Churchill, East McKeesport, East Pittsburgh, Edgewood, Forest Hills, North Braddock, Pitcairn, Plum, Rankin, Swissvale, Turtle Creek, Wall, Wilkins, Wilmerding, and Wilksburg; the townships of North Versailles and Wilkins; and the home rule communities of Monroeville and Penn Hills. The TCVCOG engages in multi-municipal planning efforts, administers the community development block grant (CDBG) program, handles sewage and refuse billing, provides payroll services, and operates a shared public works department. **The TCVCOG communities have experienced a 6% decrease and a reduction of 11,000 in population since 1950** and include the only community that demonstrated growth over the past 20 years which is Plum Borough. However, the TCVCOG also includes communities with huge population losses like Braddock, East Pittsburgh, North Braddock and Rankin. **The TCVCOG communities have a combined total of about 7,000 residential vacancies.**

TWIN RIVERS COGS (TRCOG)

Established in 1977, the Twin Rivers COG (TRCOG) is a non-profit organization that facilitates municipal planning, administers the community development block grant (CDBG) program, and coordinates joint purchasing. Its member municipalities include communities in Allegheny County: the boroughs of Elizabeth, Glassport, Liberty, Lincoln, Port Vue, Versailles, and White Oak; the townships of Elizabeth, Forward, and South Versailles; and the cities of Duquesne and McKeesport. West Newton Borough in Westmoreland County is also a member of the TRCOG. **The TRCOG has lost 40,000 people or about 42% of its population since 1950. The City of McKeesport has experienced the most severe decline, losing 62% of its population. The TRCOG communities have a combined total of about 3,000 vacant properties.**

GRIDS AND "PATTERN BOOK" BUILDINGS

Most US cities were laid out in the 18th and 19th centuries as grids. Our communities were no exception. Despite the hills, valleys, and waterways that characterize our metropolitan area, grids dominate our urban forms and rectilinear blocks were subdivided into standard lots. In the 19th and early 20th centuries there were few professional architects, and those few concentrated for the most part on major buildings – courthouses, churches, railroad stations, large office and institutional buildings,

mansions, etc. Pattern books were used by small builders for middle and lower income residential and commercial buildings. These pattern books provided standard plans, sections, and details, designed to fit into the standard lots in standard blocks. Milling industries provided the standard components – trusses, floorboards, staircases, doors, windows and dormers, porches, etc. – that enabled houses and commercial buildings to be built quickly by local craftsman-builders in response to the tides of immigrant families drawn into the rapidly expanding industries.

These blocks, streets, houses, and commercial buildings, 150-200 years old, are the heritage that dominates our urban landscape. A high percentage of the buildings that remain are in need of repair or restoration. The vacant, blighted and abandoned properties are of course standard lots, and are able to receive new pattern book buildings.

This is not an inconceivable goal. Many of the millwork industries that supplied construction a century still exist, and standard components are still available. Our community colleges and trades unions have training programs for young skilled workers. We believe that now is the time to consider the regeneration of our inherited towns.

The Steel Valley COG (SVCOG), the Turtle Creek Valley COG (TCVCOG) and the Twin Rivers COG (TRCOG), representing 42 communities in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties, wish to work together to:

1. Define and build consensus about primary goals and objectives around the vacant property issue in the 42 communities
2. Conduct an Inventory and develop GIS mapping for vacant, blighted, and abandoned properties and develop a dynamic process for regular updates
3. Improve the early identification and remediation of blighted and potentially blighted areas through aggressive, consistent, modern code enforcement techniques
4. Explore the various options and develop tools and processes for site control of vacant and blighted property, including demonstrating the construction of new pattern book buildings to preserve the architectural integrity of the community.
5. Work with advocacy groups such as the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group and the Pittsburgh Housing Alliance to advance and pursue legislative solutions at the state, county, and local level to establish land banking options and neighborhood reinvestment strategies
6. Develop alternative repurposing scenarios that include: redevelopment, private investment, greening, community facilities, economic development, and sustainability.
7. Identify, analyze, and implement tools for securing the resources necessary for sufficient structure, staffing, and funding to carry out important activities such as: acquiring properties; obtaining site control; leveraging private investment; marketing and branding; redeveloping, and repurposing vacant, blighted, and abandoned properties; create inventories of vacant sites to demonstrate the possibility of urban farming, urban forestry, etc.
8. Include a public engagement process that supports the activities, educates the public, and invites community involvement in solving the vacant, blighted, and abandoned property problem

The problem of municipal blight is not new. There has been a lot of work done nationally and in the region. The Fight Blight Strategy project where possible, will attempt to incorporate the work of others. This project will be spearheaded by the three Mon Valley COGs, but the tasks will be completed in partnership with many others.

PHASE 1: PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

TASK 1- ASSESS FINANCIAL IMPACT OF BLIGHT

Vacant land and abandoned buildings negatively impact communities in a number of ways. They undermine the aggregate and specific value of real estate within a community; cost municipalities thousands of dollars to maintain annually; and erode the tax base because of significant unpaid back taxes. Even the City of Pittsburgh has had difficulty in calculating the true cost of blight and vacant properties to City taxpayers. According to an article in the Pittsburgh Quarterly, “the precise cost that taxpayers, homeowners and municipalities pay for owning the problem in south western Pennsylvania has not been determined, although Pittsburgh’s Land Recycling Task Force, planning department and others are reportedly working the numbers and hope to have a more comprehensive picture of the economic impact on the city sometime this year.”²

The COGs recognize the importance of measuring the impact of blight in a community as it relates to potential redevelopment, assembly and disposal of abandoned property, and speedier foreclosures on tax-delinquent land and buildings. In order to properly quantify the vast impact of blight, the team will conduct a financial impact analysis community by community in order to develop a needs statement for the COGs to utilize throughout the project for the consensus building process.

The financial impact assessment will evaluate each municipality’s actual cost of maintaining the vacant properties including code enforcement, police patrol, and public works man hours. The assessment will also evaluate the lost tax revenue both from the vacant property as well as the reduction in housing value in residential areas directly surrounding the vacant properties.

The results of the financial impact analysis will be used as a project introductory tool when conducting key public and private stakeholder meetings in order to gain project consensus. It will be a key element to obtain community buy-in and to secure buy-in from potential state and federal funding sources as well as future private investors. The impact analysis will be tailored to incorporate the specific need of the municipalities located within each COG placing added emphasis on the ultimate rehabilitation goals of the project.

The COGs recognize the importance of stakeholder consensus and participation as well as the potential requirement for stakeholder participation that certain public and private funding programs may impose.

² Pittsburgh Quarterly, Fall 2011, “The Cost of Blight,” Jeffrey Fraser

- It will be important for the COGs to set realistic expectations with municipal leaders for the level of assistance it will provide for individual blight and redevelopment projects. The team will meet with appropriate municipal leaders during the development of this plan.
- The COGs may be adopting a stakeholder participation plan. The team will work with the COGs to address the participation plan.
- The use of certain public and private funding may require stakeholder participation. The team will work to comply with the citizen participation requirements associated with any public or private funding that would be utilized for the development of the Comprehensive and Strategic Redevelopment Plan (PLAN).

TASK 2 – IDENTIFY AND SCRIPT PROCESS

Developing a reasonable and rational method for evaluating the sites will be critical to the success of the COG efforts. This scripting activity will evaluate current processes at the County and Municipal level for addressing blighted, vacant, and tax delinquent properties. Once both County and Municipal processes are evaluated, the team will develop a comprehensive process based on legal requirements and areas in which the County process and Municipal process overlap.

The team will work with Allegheny County and municipal officials to identify specific processes and protocol for addressing community blight, vacancy, and delinquent tax collection. This information will be used as the foundation for identifying a comprehensive community wide process to address vacant, blighted, and abandoned properties in the Mon Valley.

TASK 2.1 – COUNTY STAFF INTERVIEW

The team will interview staff from the County Redevelopment Authority, the Allegheny County Department of Community & Economic Development (ACED), the Housing and Human Services Division of Allegheny County, the Pittsburgh Affordable Housing Council, the Pittsburgh Housing Alliance, Sustainable Pittsburgh, 10,000 Friends, and other subject matter experts in an effort to identify known strategies and solutions for addressing abandoned and blighted properties and to determine the most efficient County processes for addressing these sites.

TASK 2.2 – MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS INTERVIEW

The team will identify municipal officials, community groups, focus groups, and community leaders for interviews regarding potential properties that may be blighted, vacant sites, and property that may be a candidate for redevelopment and reuse. The municipal officials may have these types of sites/projects already identified in their comprehensive plan or other municipal plans. The team will also work with the municipal officials to identify specific processes for addressing these sites.

TASK 2.3 – DEVELOP SCRIPT OF PROCESS

The team will develop a graphic script that flow charts the current county and municipal process for dealing with vacant, blighted, and abandoned properties in the County. A master process will be

created and graphically depicted to show the entrance points, decision points, and end results of the various processes.

TASK 3 – DEVELOP INVENTORY AND MAPPING

Allegheny County, 3 Rivers Wet Weather, and the COGs possess existing documents and extensive information regarding vacant and blighted properties throughout the 42 municipalities located within the boundaries of the three COGs. This information will provide the basic background information on the location of potential sites. The team will review this basic background information, and any other applicable materials deemed important to the location of vacant and blighted properties throughout the municipalities.

TASK 3.1 – COLLECT DATA FOR THE BLIGHTED AND VACANT LOCATIONS WITHIN THE MUNICIPALITIES

Identifying both blighted and vacant properties within the 42 municipalities will provide the foundation for preparing a redevelopment plan that maximizes reuse in commercial, industrial, and residential areas – ultimately creating jobs and increasing tax revenues. While currently a community challenge, these sites provide an asset and an opportunity because they typically contain existing infrastructure; they provide a location and promote infill development; their reuse helps to reduce sprawl; and the repurposed sites are critical to the structure of a community.

TASK 3.2 – CONDUCT AN INVENTORY OF SITES AND PROPERTIES

The team will conduct a site inventory of potential blighted and vacant properties. With the assistance of interns, the team will develop a comprehensive database of sites gathered through on site evaluation and further field verification and confirmation. Municipalities with current and accurate vacant and blighted property inventories will be incorporated into the database.

TASK 3.3 – ACQUIRE INFORMATION FOR EACH SITE

The team will, to the best of its ability, obtain basic information for each site identified in Task 3.2.1. The basic information would include, but not be limited to, parcel number, current or former use, estimated size, basic description of the location, current ownership, current zoning, and existing infrastructure servicing the property from the municipalities, County, County Redevelopment Authority, and the COGs.

TASK 3.4 – DEVELOP A DATABASE OF SITES

The team will prepare a comprehensive electronic database of the identified blighted and vacant sites along with the basic information gathered in Task 3.3.

TASK 3.5 – PREPARE GIS MAP OF THE IDENTIFIED SITES WITHIN THE MUNICIPALITIES

The team will incorporate the newly identified sites into the GIS layers and create GIS maps. The maps will be presented in a fashion that will allow for easy viewing of the sites (the number of maps created will not exceed 5 maps).

TASK 4 – IDENTIFY CAPACITY NEEDS

TASK 4.1 – DEVELOPMENT OF SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND STRATEGIES

The team will recommend a viable structure, staffing, and resource level for the successful implementation of the critical tasks necessary to have a successful outcome. This recommendation will be based on the level of activity to be undertaken and the process that has been identified in the scripting in Task 2 and will include but not be limited to:

- An assessment of the COGs’ current staffing levels, structure, activities, and budgets
- A review of the specific activities to be undertaken and the time necessary to complete the critical tasks
- A strategy that addresses the implementation of the recommended activities and assigns responsibility and tasks necessary for completion
- Recommendations that will identify roadblocks (if any) to implementation as well as feasibility of implementation and the potential benefits of the recommendations
- Opportunities to improve the technology systems in order to support the planned activities
- Alternative methods for providing the identified services that are acceptable to the COGs and member communities

The strategies will be specific and will recommend short-, medium-, and long-range objectives that the COGs should implement in order to have a successful implementation. The strategies will specify the individual responsible for implementation as well as the schedule for completion and any associated costs.

TASK 5– IDENTIFY RESOURCES

TASK 5.1 – PUBLIC FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In order to maximize and leverage public funding opportunities, the team will evaluate the viability of pursuing several funding sources for the identified infrastructure needs, environmental remediation requirements, and essential development components. It will be necessary to identify funding to achieve projects and establish programs and operational funding in order to building organizational capacity.

The funding opportunities for the various sites may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Federal Opportunities

- HUD Sustainable Communities Grants
- Neighborhood Stabilization Program
- US Department of Transportation – Smart Transportation Grants
- US Economic Development Administration – Public Works Assistance Grants

STATE OPPORTUNITIES

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Housing and Redevelopment Assistance Program
- Industrial Sites Reuse Program
- Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PENNVEST) Brownfield Loan Program
- Infrastructure Development Program
- Neighborhood Assistance Program
- Infrastructure & Facilities Improvement Program
- Business in Our Sites
- Building PA
- Tax Increment Financing Guarantee
- HUD 108 Guarantee
- PHFA
- Tax Credit Programs
- Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP)
- Pennsylvania’s Alternative Energy Investment Fund (AEIF)
- Pennsylvania Energy Development Authority (PEDA)

County Opportunities

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Allegheny County Community Infrastructure and Tourism Fund (CITF)
- Allegheny County Community Gaming Economic Development Fund (GEDF)

The team will monitor new funding programs created by the federal and state government during the development of this plan.

TASK 5.2 – PUBLIC FUNDING MATRIX

The team will prepare a public funding matrix. The matrix will identify all potential state funding sources that may be utilized for identified infrastructure needs, environmental remediation, or redevelopment and/or reuse of the sites. The matrix will include identified sources, state agencies and programs, and target application deadlines.

TASK 5.3 – NONTRADITIONAL FUNDING MECHANISMS

The team will evaluate self-sustaining financing mechanisms that may be utilized for specific redevelopment which may include structuring special assessment districts and nontraditional funding mechanisms, including Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts, tax credits, Transit Revitalization Investment Districts (TRID), Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Neighborhood Improvement Districts (NIDs), and Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act (LERTA) Districts, all of which can be integral to maintaining operational support for projects undertaken in the public realm.

TASK 6 – PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the 3 phases of the project, the team will work to build consensus among a variety of stakeholders. The purpose of public engagement is threefold:

1. To obtain critical information from key stakeholders and subject matter experts
2. To invite public comment, gather information, and build consensus in the communities
3. To identify the champions of the project in order to advance project goals and objectives

TASK 6.1 – BACKGROUND REVIEW AND PREPARATION

TASK 6.1.1 – REVIEW BACKGROUND MATERIALS

The team will review all available back ground material in order to prepare for public outreach activities.

TASK 6.1.2 – IDENTIFY COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Based on the identification of specific activities, the team will work with the COGs to establish a list of key stakeholders from various levels of business, community, and civic engagement. Individuals may be selected from municipal governments, county government, nonprofit organizations, community organizations, resident groups, business leaders, economic development officials, planners, and others with interest in the future success of the Mon Valley communities.

TASK 6.1.3 – IDENTIFY REGIONAL PARTNERS

The team will identify and engage community partners including but not limited to the Allegheny Conference, the Local Government Academy, Young Preservationists, the Housing Alliance, Sustainable Pittsburgh, and 10,000 Friends.

TASK 6.2 – FOCUS GROUP FACILITATION

TASK 6.2.1 – PUBLIC OUTREACH MEETINGS

The team will schedule and facilitate public outreach sessions. It will develop a list of questions for participants based on common recurring themes within the COG communities. Participants will be asked to rank challenges in order of importance while expanding on any additional issues identified during group facilitation. The critical issues identified will be used to develop the primary objectives of a new, more comprehensive and supportive vacant, blighted, and abandoned property program

Objectives for public outreach include:

- Identification of critical issues through an interactive stakeholder process
- Discussion and identification of solutions to challenging issues facing the COG communities
- Classification of current programs as either successful or unsuccessful in meeting the objectives of the communities

TASK 6.2.2 – ELECTRONIC SURVEY

The team will also be responsible for designing and hosting an electronic survey that will be based on the critical issues that have been identified and will be available to the public via community websites and community partner links. The team will be responsible for tabulating, summarizing and reporting the results.

TASK 6.3 – PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Based on the top challenges identified in Task 6.2.1, major objectives for the stakeholders will be stated and used as a basis for formulating comprehensive strategies to be considered for new program development. These strategies will address which current programs and activities are successful and relevant and what new programs and activities should be undertaken.

PHASE II: PROJECT CAPACITY BUILDING

TASK 1 – BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

The team will implement the recommendations relative to organizational structure, staffing, budgets, resources, and processes that will support critical activities that will be undertaken by the COGs relative to the strategies identified in Phase I.

TASK 2 – RESEARCH AND ADOPT BEST PRACTICES

The team will conduct a review of best practices based on interviews with subject matter experts and the public outreach process. The team will provide a report on best practices and will develop implementing ordinances and regulations that can be adopted by communities as the project progresses.

TASK 3– IDENTIFY PROCESS

The team will identify modern and efficient processes related to:

- Site Control
- Side Lot Programs
- Code Enforcement
- Land Banking
- Redevelopment and Repurposing

TASK 3.1 – OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The team will prepare a focused strategy for obtaining site control where necessary. The team will assess and evaluate the legal process and options involved in obtaining site control.

TASK 3.2 – SIDE LOT PROGRAM

The team will prepare a focused and efficient process for facilitating the site control of side lots to adjacent property owners that is affordable and sustainable.

TASK 4– DEVELOP ONLINE TOOLS

The team will develop an on-line interactive tool that will provide information to residents, public officials, potential private investors and others who may be interested in the COGs vacant, blighted, and abandoned property program. The on-line tool will have the ability to be updated routinely by the COGs to include the most current information about available properties and to also provide assistance for the site control process that is developed in Phase I of the project.

TASK 5 – IDENTIFY IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS AND RESOURCES

The team will identify resources and tools to support the implementation strategies. These strategies will include, but will not be limited to the establishment of the following:

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPP) – The PPP matrix will identify the partnerships required to build the technical, financial, and political capabilities necessary for the COGs to successfully implement the program. As part of this analysis, the team will provide information and modeling based on the Department of Community and Economic Development’s Neighborhood Assistance Program and Neighborhood Partnership Program tax credits approach.

SPECIAL ASSESSMENT DISTRICT – The team will evaluate the feasibility and assist with the establishment of a special assessment district (e.g. Transportation Development District, LERTA Revenue Assessment Program) as a key public-private partnership to support the municipality’s revitalization.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MARKETING AND ATTRACTION STRATEGY – The Economic Development Marketing and Attraction Strategy will promote the Strategy and target businesses that (1) best match the COG’s region’s assets and/or competitive advantages; (2) best coincide with the COG’s overall economic development goals; and (3) have the best investment and growth potential to help diversify the COG’s economic base.

REGULATORY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – The regulatory and policy recommendations will detail the necessary zoning, subdivision, and land development ordinance revisions required to implement the Strategy. Other regulatory and policy considerations may include access regulations, capital improvements planning, and special financing policies such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA).

PUBLIC TRANSIT-RELATED STRATEGIES – Strategies relative to transit-oriented development, Transit Redevelopment and Investment Districts (TRID), and zoning overlays for Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) which address important connections between the business

district, the neighborhoods, and the Light Rail Transit (LRT) will be explored. Recommended policy strategies will be included in the final Strategy. These strategies will be designed to maximize opportunities related to public transit for the downtown area.

TASK 6 – DEVELOP A LEGISLATIVE STRATEGY

The team, with non-profit advocacy groups such as PCRG and the Pittsburgh Housing Alliance, will develop a comprehensive legislative strategy for the creation of a new funding source that will help to meet the unique needs and scale of the targeted projects. The new funding mechanism will be a type of special assessment taxing district that will allow the COGS to capture revenue regionally from the communities benefitting from the targeted improvements. The legislative strategy will include the following tasks:

- Develop a comprehensive message statement to be used in meetings with public officials on the economic need to create a new regional tax program to provide incentive grants for undertaking development projects of regional importance.
- Prepare an outline of the draft enabling legislation for the new funding program.
- Identify and meet with the appropriate legislative champions for the recommended program.
- Meet with applicable state agency officials to build support for the new program.
- Develop action strategies for the support and enactment of the new program.
- Develop a broad-based stakeholder support strategy for the new program.

PHASE III: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT/EXECUTION

TASK 1 – ESTABLISH LAND BANK

Land bank legislation is gaining national attention for its positive impact on urban blight and abandonment. Instead of selling abandoned or foreclosed structures at auction, the communities can transfer site control to the COGs who can create a land bank of properties allowing for vacant and abandoned structures to be rehabilitated and sold, or demolished. The land can then be sold to homeowners or developers. The money generated from the sales and the collection of delinquent taxes allows the land banks to pay for the rehabilitation or demolition. The team will explore the options of developing a COG-wide land bank allowing for a comprehensive rehabilitation approach.

TASK 2 – ASSESS THE MARKET FOR DEVELOPMENT

TASK 2.1 – DETERMINE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the demographic information collected for the residential units and commercial establishments, the team will note gaps in the real estate environment in the COG communities and the missing amenities desired by consumers. The team will also note the housing and commercial establishments that appear to be underperforming and describe opportunities for new types of

establishments and/or consumer amenities that will contribute to the attractiveness of the neighborhoods and are desired in the study area. For underperforming establishments, the team will suggest opportunities to enhance their appeal to consumers.

TASK 2.2 – IDENTIFY POTENTIAL MARKET CAPTURE – QUANTITATIVE

RETAIL AND DINING

The team will assess the retail sales potential for the COG communities based on disposable income, population, and other variables. The team will identify the gaps for retail and dining based on a retail gap analysis in the COG communities.

OFFICE SPACE

The team will conduct a comprehensive review of the availability of Class A and B office space and will assemble information and data relative to rents and sales. Basic information from the stakeholder interviews will be used to validate the market and to assist in generating recommendations for the potential for additional office space on the sites that offer the highest and best potential for this use.

HOUSING

The team will conduct a comprehensive review of the current housing demand and availability in the COG communities. In part, the team will rely on information that is available through ESRI and the 2010 census to identify housing trends. The team will also consider population trends, population characteristics, labor sheds, community tapestry projections, and the proximity of employment center opportunities that will support future housing. The team will utilize all available sources of information for the communities in an attempt to predict the best potential for “catalytic” residential opportunities.

TASK 2.3 – IDENTIFY MARKET POTENTIAL CAPTURE: QUALITATIVE

Building on previous studies and research, the team will meet with private developers to conduct a comprehensive analysis to determine the highest and best market potential for specific redevelopment strategies for the defined market area. The market analysis will identify target land uses and the depth of the market to support each use.

Based on this research, the team will recommend the residential, commercial, services, and retail sectors with the highest potential for market capture in the COG communities. The team will also identify the types of retail and service sectors with the best market potential for recruitment.

TASK 2.4 – IDENTIFY MARKET ANCHOR OPPORTUNITIES

The team will identify the development opportunities that have the potential for “catalytic” impact for the communities and will serve as the best anchor for supporting businesses, uses, and complementary development.

As part of this analysis, specific sites will be identified as anchor development opportunities. The team will provide preliminary assessment of the site specifics for each identified site, including but not limited to physical characteristics, environment, infrastructure, transportation, utilities, and accessibility.

TASK 3 – IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE DEVELOPMENT SITES

TASK 3.1 – DESIGN BASELINE METRICS FOR EVALUATING SITES

The team will use a unique and distinctive approach for developing baseline metrics for applying the criteria that should be used for selecting and recruiting appropriate development which will have a significant and catalytic impact on the COGs market area. The use of this system for assessing development potential ensures that COGs objectives are directly linked to the evaluation of sites. A sample matrix is shown below:

CRITERIA FOR SITE SELECTION	SITE No. 1	SITE No. 2	SITE No. 3	SITE No. 4	SITE No. 5
	1-STRONGLY SATISFIES	1-STRONGLY SATISFIES	1-STRONGLY SATISFIES	1-STRONGLY SATISFIES	1-STRONGLY SATISFIES
	2 – GENERALLY SATISFIES	2 – GENERALLY SATISFIES	2 – GENERALLY SATISFIES	2 – GENERALLY SATISFIES	2 – GENERALLY SATISFIES
	3 – DOES NOT SATISFY	3 – DOES NOT SATISFY	3 – DOES NOT SATISFY	3 – DOES NOT SATISFY	3 – DOES NOT SATISFY
Physical attractiveness of site and amenities					
Proximity to public transportation					
Proximity to arterial/primary roadways					
On-site parking					
Proximity to complementary/support businesses and services					
Proximity to “critical mass” of establishments and amenities					
Sufficient land/space to support potential uses					
Infrastructure capacity (water, sewer, gas, electric)					
Technology infrastructure					
Zoning consistency with proposed use					
Potential cost of site preparation					
Eligibility for development incentives					
Site control					
Potential as an anchor site					
Potential for building reuse					
Historical value of property					
Ability to leverage private investment					

TASK 3.2 – DEVELOP PROGRAMMING CONCEPTS

As part of this process, the team will identify site programming concepts for potential uses (e.g., commercial, office, recreation, civic, historic, and institutional) that are appropriate for the COG redevelopment strategy. As part of this process, the team will recommend where scarce resources should initially be targeted and concentrated.

The team will evaluate the general impacts of residential, commercial, retail, and service opportunities based on a number of criteria, including but not limited to the following:

- Identified project goals/objectives
- Market support
- Private-sector financial issues
- Public-sector economic and fiscal issues

- Ease of implementation
- Conformance with land use concepts and zoning
- Adherence to community and local government goals and objectives
- Identified near-term redevelopment opportunities

TASK 4 - MARKET SITES FOR REDEVELOPMENT

TASK 4.1 PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

The team will identify the best opportunities for priority site selection that will support and accommodate the desired uses based on the site selection criteria and validated by the market study. The team will develop a focused strategy for obtaining site control where necessary. A portfolio containing relevant site information will be developed for up to 10 priority sites.

TASK 4.2 BASE MAP DEVELOPMENT

A base map drawing will be developed indicating the approximate existing site conditions for each identified site to be marketed for redevelopment. The base map will include the following items as they apply:

- Property name and property boundary
- Name of municipality/owner
- Scale @ 1"=100', graphic scale, north arrow, date, legend
- Acreage of site
- Site boundaries with bearings and distances
- Site zoning and zoning of surrounding properties
- Boundary lines of adjacent property parcels where they intersect with planning site
- Existing uses of surrounding property
- General location and type of easements on the site
- Deed restrictions on the site
- Topography
- Existing structures and facilities, including utilities installations and stormwater facilities
- Circulation patterns (access roads/service drives/parking/trails/walks/ramps/paths and bridges)
- Natural and man-made barriers
- Water features (streams/rivers/ponds/lakes)
- Floodplains (100-year flood level)
- Drainage structures (culverts/catch basins/inlets/ditches/under-drains)

- Site control structures (fences/dikes/walls)
- Rights-of-way
- Easements
- Vegetation (trees/forested areas/farmland)
- Soils and limiting subsurface conditions
- Other site features that may impact the use and development of the site

TASK 4.3 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Once the information is compiled, mapping available, and the portfolio developed, the team may prepare one or more RFPs for development of the identified sites.

TASK 4.4 EVALUATE PROPOSALS

The team will work with the appropriate municipalities in selecting a firm or firms that are most qualified to plan and design the project with consideration of the overall project goals. The qualified firms will prepare and complete a comprehensive set of documents for approval.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

The COGs intend to address the funding for each Phase of the project on an annual basis. A proposed schedule for addressing the Phases is shown below.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE FOR THE PROJECT					
ACTIVITY	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Phase I - Project Identification	X				
Task 1.1 Assess Financial Impact	X				
Task 1.2 Identify and Script Project	X				
Task 1.3 Develop Inventory and Mapping	X	X			
Task 1.4 Identify Capacity Needs	X	X			
Task 1.5 Identify Resources	X	X			
Task 1. 6 Public Engagement	X	X	X	X	X
Phase II - Project Capacity Building					
Task 2.1 Build Organizational Capacity		X	X	X	X
Task 2.2 Research and Adopt Best Practices		X	X		
Task 2.3 Establish Process		X	X		
Task 2. 4 Develop On-Line Tools		X			
Task 2.5 Identify Implementation Tools/Resources		X	X	X	X
Task 2.6 Develop a Legislative Strategy		X	X	X	
Phase III - Project Development/Execution					
Task 3.1 Establish Land Bank			X	X	X
Task 3.2 Assess the Market for Development			X	X	X
Task 3.3 Identify & Prioritize Development Sites				X	X
Task 3.4 Market Sites for Redevelopment				X	X