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Dreams Come True When You're CMU

2009 Study Outlines University's Plan to "Remake" Pittsburgh

By Junction Coalition

In 2009, as Barack Obama settled into his first term as president and future Pittsburgh mayor Bill Peduto campaigned for another term on City Council, the Remaking Cities Institute of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) released a document of "recommendations" called "Remaking Hazelwood".

This document is more relevant than ever as Mayor Peduto prepares to step down. His tenure is defined by catering to local universities and foundations—as well as bending over backward for companies like Amazon and Uber.

That Peduto failed to transform CMU's recommendations into reality was not for lack of trying. Many items from CMU's 2009 wish list resurfaced during Peduto's two terms as his own lofty visions for Pittsburgh's future. One such item was a bridge across the Monongahela River to service Almono Partners' development site (Hazelwood Green). Other elements of the plan required adjustments over the years, such as placement of the controversial Mon-Oakland Connector (MOC) shuttle road.

The following highlights show the report went a long way toward setting the Peduto administration's agenda. You can read additional excerpts with direct links and expanded analysis at www.opnnews.org.

Disregard for residents of Four Mile Run (The Run)

The Run is expressly listed among the communities in the "focus area" of recommendations and referenced as "The Run section of Hazelwood" (p. 6, 20, 28). However, The Run is officially part of Greenfield and Run residents were not consulted about the Remaking Cities Institute's plan.

This inaccuracy reveals the hypocrisy of statements like the one on p. 40: "The community vision is for the full integration of Hazelwood, Oakland and Junction Hollow into the mixed-used (sic) redevelopment of the ALMONO site. The community has stated repeatedly that it wishes to see a diversity of uses that would expand existing training and employment opportunities for residents and create stronger physical and economic connections to surrounding communities."

When the report states, "Local residents and business owners have participated in several community visioning and planning processes (p. 44)," they are referring to Hazelwood residents and business owners. Run residents learned of the city's intent to build the MOC through their neighborhood from a 2015 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article.

No "community visioning" process took place in The Run even though "Interventions included a dense, mixed-use waterfront district at the foot of Junction Hollow [directly adjacent to The Run]..." (p. 18) Also referenced as a "Transit Oriented Development" called "Four Mile Run Neighborhood," its "high-rise apartments atop a multi-modal station at the base of Junction Hollow near Greenfield Avenue and the Pittsburgh Technology Center" would wall off the original Four Mile Run neighborhood from the river and downtown skyline (p. 76, 85).

Besides working with certain Hazelwood organizations, Almono Partners was collaborating with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (PPC) on improvements to Schenley Park. The improvements were not designed to fix combined sewer overflows in the area, although the report came out the same year as a devastating 75-year flood in The Run. Some proposed "improvements" even had the potential to worsen matters, such as replacing grass with artificial turf and adding acres of other impervious surfaces.

Ensuing years have brought more floods to The Run—10 major ones in the past 15 years—along with increased public awareness. Almono Partners and the authors of "Remaking Hazelwood" knew the nature of the problem in 2009, if not before. But they focused on building the MOC, not addressing the flooding.

Lip service to Hazelwood's needs while promoting conditions that displace existing community members

On p. 24, the report acknowledges that during the post-industrial/economic decline after 1960, "Hazelwood's existing conditions are the result of cumulative years of disinvestment that has affected every sector." *continued on page 2*



View of Occupied People's Park—Sixth Ave. and Grant St.

On October 15, 2011, 4000+ people—made up of social justice organizations, unions, churches, activists and everyday citizens marched through Downtown Pittsburgh chanting "Banks Got Bailed Out, We Got Sold Out" and "We Are the 99%." Demanding social and economic justice, the march led to a 117-day Occupation of the public park at Sixth Ave. and Grant St. Arguably the longest Occupation in the world, Pittsburgh's was the only Occupation to have successfully seized land from a bank—which BNY Mellon had previously seized from the public. During the Occupation, passersby honked their horns in support and shouted encouragement while citizens across the region donated money, food, clothing and more in support of Occupiers. After 10 years, Pittsburghers continue working to obtain social and economic justice for the 99%.

Transit Advocates Launch Statewide Funding Campaign

On June 29, 2021, more than 100 transit riders, transit workers, and organizational supporters from across Pennsylvania launched the Transit for All PA! (TP4APA!) platform with a rally on the capitol steps in Harrisburg. Earlier in June, the PA state legislature passed a budget that did not include future public transit funding—even though Pennsylvania's main transit funding bill, Act 89, is set to expire in July 2022. As a result, PA is in danger of losing the PA transit systems that fuel its economy and connect its citizens to life's essentials.

According to a Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT) press release, PA's economy and progress toward better air quality and less congestion are contingent on quality affordable and abundant transit. "Losing public transit would be disastrous for Pennsylvania. Transit reliably improves economic mobility and public health for the Commonwealth's older adults, people with disabilities, youth, low-income households and people of color. The sunset of Act 89 will also risk the livelihoods of thousands of good, union jobs for workers in transit service provision and transit parts manufacturing in all regions of the state. Essential workers and the goods and services they provide like healthcare and groceries are reliant on fully-funded transit and the loss of dedicated transit funding will jeopardize PA's pandemic recovery." *continued on page 4*



What Is BDS?

Questions Answered - Myths Dispelled

By BDS Pittsburgh Coalition

Are you feeling less informed about Israel and Palestine than you'd like? Are you wondering what BDS is and if Ben and Jerry are anti-semites? Don't let the swirling narratives intimidate you. The story is only complicated if historical facts are omitted, twisted, or made up to serve a particular point of view.

BDS stands for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. The BDS movement was called in 2005 by Palestinian civil society. The aim of BDS is equal rights for everyone who lives in Israel/Palestine, and for Palestinian refugees. There are three demands on Israel:

1. End the occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantle the wall. The wall was and is being built between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, yet is constructed on Palestinian lands and separates many Palestinian families from their land. It also encircles numerous Palestinian neighborhoods and towns, thus cutting them off from the surrounding areas. Approximately 14 percent of Palestinian land lies on the Israeli side of the wall.
2. Recognize the fundamental rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality. Twenty percent of Israeli citizens are Palestinians or their descendants who remained within the armistice lines in 1948, when Israel declared its statehood. Currently, 50 laws are on the Israeli books that affect the lives of those Palestinians. Israel continues to displace Palestinian communities within Israel from their lands.
3. Respect, protect, and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as stipulated by the UN.

Until these demands are met, BDS calls for boycotting any product coming from Israel, any

product benefiting from the occupation, and any interaction that promotes the continuation of the occupation.

You may ask:

"If Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews are both equal under the law in Israel, and if Palestinians can return to the homes they left in 1948, won't Israel cease to be a Jewish majority state? And don't the Jews deserve their own state?"

The Jewish people deserve to live free of anti-Semitism everywhere in the world. The Palestinian people deserve to be afforded the same human rights as the rest of humanity. The people who lived and live in Palestine were not responsible for the worldwide horrors of anti-Semitism that culminated in Nazi Germany. A state in Israel/Palestine can exist in which Jews and non-Jews are both afforded the same civil and human rights. Zionism is an ideology and a movement that supports a Jewish state in what is now Israel. In practice, it is a colonial enterprise that settled mostly European Jews on land taken from dispossessed Arab Palestinians. The support that Israel receives from the Western world is based more on the asset of having a Western-facing entity in the oil-rich Middle East than it is on any concern for the well-being of Jewish people. Zionism in that sense can be seen as a tool of Western society, and visa versa.

"Don't Jews have an historic claim to the land?"

Israelites lived in antiquity in Israel/Palestine along with many other peoples; Canaanites, Philistines, Phoenicians—the list goes on. And the ancient kingdom of Israel lasted about 300 years, give or take a few. The ancient history of the region also saw other kingdoms in dominance: Egyptians, Assyrians, and Persians, among others. The kingdom of Israel was one of many. The exclusivity of the Jewish history in what is now Israel/Palestine is a biblical construct. Centering Jews in the history of the area is the same as centering white people in the history of the world—as in the history you've been hearing since first grade.

"I've heard BDS is anti-semitic, is that true?"

BDS is unfairly accused of wanting to destroy Israel. What BDS wants to destroy is the denial of humanity to Arab Palestinians inside Israel, in the occupied West Bank and in the Palestinian diaspora. It is argued that BDS wants to deny Jews, "the only people in the world without their own country," the right to live in a country in which only Jews have rights. BDS maintains that Jews and Arab Palestinians should be able to live with equal rights within that country. The backlash against BDS includes equating anti-Zionism, or a belief that Palestinians can have equal rights in Israel/Palestine, with anti-semitism. This is the same tactic the Mafia used in the 1970s when it equated anti-Mafia law enforcement with an anti-Italian conspiracy (FBI=Forever Bothering Italians). Thirty-five states have anti-BDS laws in place. (Ben and Jerry decided not to sell their ice cream on land that international law declares was stolen from Palestine. The ice cream is still sold in Israel proper, but Arizona has canceled all its contracts with them.)

"Why is BDS needed, can't both sides just negotiate to a peaceful solution?"

United States-brokered negotiations have been taking place since 1991 and as a local Palestinian woman once explained, "Palestine is offered smaller and smaller plates of food." Israel will not agree to even the bare minimum conditions set by international law, and the Palestinians are accused of not negotiating because they refuse to accept these extremely one-sided conditions. In the meantime, Israel continues to flaunt international law by illegally obtaining more and more Palestinian land and transferring Israelis to Jewish only settlements there—also in violation of international law. To make matters worse, the United States continues to fund Israel to the tune of about \$3.8 billion per year, unconditionally, regardless of any violations of international law. If the United States won't put pressure on Israel, it is up to us to bring economic and political pressure to bear via BDS.

For more information:
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However, lest one think investment means a reversal of intentions behind the earlier disinvestment, the report again conflates Hazelwood with The Run. "Hazelwood's landscape has been altered in the past two centuries at a rate that far exceeds previous natural morphological transformation... The most notable change has been the burial of the Four Mile Run [stream]." After acknowledging the risk of displacing poor and black residents, the report presents a chart on p. 31 that predicts Hazelwood will experience the most dramatic population growth in Pittsburgh because of development on Hazelwood Green. If the report does not celebrate the prospect of displacement, it also does not offer any specific, well-formulated ideas for preventing this outcome.

A "permanent, speedy connection" between Oakland and Hazelwood for university personnel

The report is not coy about this key wish-list item: "The importance of providing a permanent, rapid link between Hazelwood, Oakland and downtown cannot be overstated. It is the singular most important gesture that will ensure the success of the ALMONO site's redevelopment." (p. 45, emphasis in original) One reason for the link between Oakland and the development site: "In addition to the private market, Carnegie Mellon is interested in developing new housing for 500 undergraduate and 500 graduate students ... If transportation can be provided to the main campus, the ALMONO site could prove a viable site for

university-affiliated housing." (p. 36) This plan seems to prioritize packing students into profitable housing—essentially expanding CMU's campus—above the needs of existing residents.

Control of publicly-held land in Junction Hollow

Creating a dedicated "link" between the development and universities rather than using existing routes also reflects a long-term goal to privatize the Junction Hollow corridor: "Carnegie Mellon University and local partners Oakland Catholic High School, Central Catholic High School, and Winchester Thurston School have proposed building three artificial surfaced athletic fields in Junction Hollow which, outside of their programming, would be open to the public." (p. 32) The report does not mention the existing fully public soccer field in Junction Hollow—part of Schenley Park, a public park. Additional references to CMU and partners taking over Junction Hollow with "semi-public" athletic fields are on p. 66, 77, 88, and 89.

Re-imagining all nearby infrastructure to support the ALMONO development

In March 2019, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's editorial board rhapsodized over Mayor Peduto's "great idea" to build a new bridge between Becks Run Road and Hazelwood Green. But the idea wasn't new—it can be found on p. 45, 61, and 73 of the 2009 "Remaking Hazelwood" report.

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Hold Fast: opposing the Nihilism of the Right

By Kate Luce-Angell

When Occupy Wall Street became news 10 years ago, I was a recently divorced mother of two young kids. My financial situation had dramatically declined since I became a single mom, and at times I had been worried that I could lose my shared custody of my young son and daughter if it got any worse and I had to move back in with my mom. I had parlayed some poorly paid freelance work into a tenuous part-time position in marketing but I was hyper-aware that it could all go away, quickly—including any ability to pay my mortgage, buy groceries and provide for my children.

Occupy was something that gave voice to my anger at the abject terror I felt at the prospect of losing everything I cared about simply because I'd gotten divorced and I couldn't pay enough for it. It gave me a movement to invest in that spoke to every systemic wrong in the world. And most important—it inspired hope in me that things could change.

Occupy did change things. Organized labor has made gains; progressive candidates across the country have won elections and a majority of Americans now believe that economic inequity, climate change and police brutality are major problems that must be addressed. But for every step forward, the right has tightened its grip. We're looking at the real possibility of a one-party, authoritarian United States emerging over the next few years. Laws are being enacted that criminalize even common forms of protest—including the tactics and strategies we used 10 years ago to move the needle of public awareness. Things seem pretty hopeless, and they may get worse before they get better. But besides organizing and fighting like hell, there are a few other things we need to do.

Don't give up. It's what they want. We're being attacked from all sides, at all times, by the brutish nihilism of the right. The magniloquent, endless lies; the gleeful corruption, from petty to total; the commitment to dehumanizing anyone who displays compassion or appears different; the insistence on taking us all down with the ship if it just "trolls the libs"—as the writer Adam Serwer has said, "the cruelty is the point." Hope is a radical act in these times. And I don't mean the hope of watching others get their "just desserts," but of seeing justice served, people's lives improved, a better world for ourselves and the people who come after us. The hope that things can change. It's what drew many of us to Occupy in the first place and we need to hold on to it. It's what makes us who we are.

Believe—but not everything. Nihilism and despair don't serve us; they only serve the opposition. Holding on to our core principles and beliefs are crucial, especially while the right has descended into a fact-free mass delusion. But conspiracy theories and paranoia aren't confined to the right. While we all have every reason to doubt what we're told, it's more important than ever that we don't fall victim to false information. Truth matters, and it should matter to us. Plus we've already seen first-hand during this pandemic that distinguishing between fact and fiction is a powerful survival tactic. Truth is on our side.

You are the most potent weapon in this fight. Take care of yourself. Activism of any kind is exhausting, and self-care is a radical act when the world around us treats us as disposable. But activism requires activists—Occupying requires people to occupy. We need to value ourselves, both our minds and bodies, as key tools for change. It's easy to get caught up in the urgent, catastrophic need around us and feel guilt for resting or taking a pause, but burning out doesn't help anyone. As the folks at the Nap Ministry say, "Rest is resistance."

Ten years ago, I would not have believed how much worse things would get over the following decade. But I also could not have predicted that we'd win some of the victories we've seen, or that so many of us would remain committed to the same vision. Many, even most, of the people I knew from Occupy Pittsburgh have gone on to continue the fight in different ways—by organizing, by volunteering, by contributing or supporting others. And now there are people too young to have seen the camp in the People's Park who have joined that fight, too. Let us hold fast—to our work, our belief in justice, and our hope for change.

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"As philanthropic foundations, the ALMONO LP partners operate within a different accountability paradigm than municipal governments, for-profit and non-profit developers."
—"Remaking Hazelwood" study, p. 44

The report's authors express their view of Pittsburgh as their playground on p. 45: "The urban design recommendations proposed in this document extend beyond the boundary of the ALMONO site. The end of Four Mile Run valley, the hillside and Second Avenue are all critical to the overall framework. Some of these areas are publicly-held; others are privately-owned... The ALMONO, LP could try to purchase these sites. Failing that, the URA can support the project by purchasing those properties that are within the scope of the recommendations and making them available for redevelopment in accordance with the proposed strategy."

To a lesser degree, they also suggest an inverse strategy: disinvestment in infrastructure that is not useful to Hazelwood Green. For example, on p. 78: "In twenty years or so, we propose that the portion of Second Avenue between Greenfield Avenue and Mobile Street (currently named Irvine Street) be closed and the space incorporated into the Hazelwood Greenway, perhaps to be used for productive landscapes, sustainable water capturing landscapes or recreational fields."

"Robot City"

CMU is known for its military-funded research and development of robots, but typically refrains from publicizing that part of its work. However, the "Remaking Hazelwood" authors gushed about making Robot City a centerpiece of the ALMONO/Hazelwood Green development: "Robot enthusiasts and passersby could view non-military testing occurring on the site through viewing platforms." (p. 102)

Robot City, too, relied on building the MOC: "A permanent, speedy connection to Carnegie Mellon and Oakland via Junction Hollow is considered a requirement for Robot City's success, permitting an unobstructed flow of researchers, students and faculty." (p. 100)

The idea of hosting killer robots lacks community appeal, and Robot City has retreated to obscurity in public discussions of Hazelwood Green.

Who decides the future?

Strong community opposition has plagued the MOC plan since it emerged from its silo of professional consultants and friendly focus groups. Six years after its original public unveiling, construction has yet to begin. During the 2021 mayoral primary election campaign, only Mayor Peduto endorsed the MOC—and became Pittsburgh's first incumbent mayor to be unseated since 1933. Public officials confide off the record that the MOC is "dead." But dreams backed by enough money and power never die. The MOC and the Hazelwood Green bridge both feature in Pittsburgh's 2070 Mobility Vision Plan.

Mayor Peduto sells the visions of Pittsburgh's foundations, universities, and big developers as essential to Pittsburgh's future, yet developing those visions behind closed doors leaves a huge blind spot when it comes to the future of Pittsburgh's residents. More and more people are being pushed to the city outskirts and beyond thanks to unchecked real estate speculation. Mayor Peduto's administration has sacrificed his constituents to fulfill the dreams of moneyed interests.

Time has shown that CMU is unwilling to reconsider its priorities—even where they contradict the feel-good language in their "Remaking Hazelwood" report and undermine their supposedly community-empowering/environmentally friendly goals.

A statement on p. 44 of the report offers insight on why they feel no need to do so: "As philanthropic foundations, the ALMONO, LP partners operate within a different accountability paradigm than municipal governments, for-profit and non-profit developers."

Junction Coalition is a grassroots multi-community organization that began in The Run. Read their blog at junctioncoalition.org and contact them at junctioncoalition@gmail.com.



Pittsburgh's Forests: Climate Carbon Bank or Developer's Quick Buck?

By Matt Peters

After several years of public comment and neighborhood meetings, the city of Pittsburgh in 2017 enacted a Climate Action Plan to establish a comprehensive strategy for climate change preparedness and mitigation. The chapter on forests begins with the straightforward imperative to “HALT the conversion of forest canopy to development.” Now, the neighborhood of Hazelwood is becoming a testing ground for Pittsburgh’s Climate Plan—with the proposal of a housing development project impacting the edge of a Greenway corridor that connects the core forest to nearby Schenley Park.

At their monthly board meeting on Sept. 9, 2021, the URA agreed to enter into a six-month exclusive negotiations agreement with Oak Moss Consulting Inc. to give their Woods Village housing proposal a closer look. The Woods Village proposal would build 62 prefabricated apartment rentals, more suited for students than for family housing, while clearing several city lots adjacent to the Greenway that have reforested themselves to a young stand of black locust and a few other primary-succession species. The URA did add a condition that Oak Moss examine their impact on the environment, but self-reporting is seldom thorough or even trustworthy when a profit motive is involved. The irony of the city touting its redevelopment of one of the largest brownfields in America as a model of green and sustainable urban revitalization, yet allowing the degradation of its urban forests to continue, has inspired a lively conversation among several city agencies including Forestry, Planning, and Hazelwood’s City Councilperson Corey O’Connor.

Examination of the particulars of the Woods Village proposal has revealed alarming vulnerabilities in Hazelwood’s Greenway system, as not all forest canopy is protected under this designation. Cutting down the forests threatened by the Woods Village proposal—and others like it soon to follow—would eradicate a key connecting corridor linking the Schenley Park “core area” to the central mass of Hazelwood’s Greenway forests. This connectivity is enough to support a robust array of wildlife that includes coyotes and foxes along with deer, turkey, hawks, owls, and songbirds such as wood thrush, vireo, tanager, and warbler. Severing this narrow connecting corridor will result in two smaller habitat fragments that will not add up to the sum of the connected whole because of how the dynamics of island ecology and forest fragmentation work.

The city of Pittsburgh is at a key transition point in its history, having emerged as a climate leader on the global stage under the eight years of Mayor Bill Peduto’s administration. Peduto lost his incumbency to State Representative Ed Gainey in the most recent primary elections and, presuming he wins the upcoming November election, Mr. Gainey seems poised to continue this progressive green trend in his administration. His strong interest in addressing inherently racist or otherwise discriminatory civic structures will mean less of a presence on the international stage than his predecessor, but his ability to listen to the needs of the grassroots in each neighborhood may mean forest advocates will find a forum to articulate the need for forest protection and expansion within the city.

We can meet the need for affordable housing, neighborhood revitalization, transportation improvements—and address the other issues urban dwellers face—while preserving our urban forests for future generations.

Hazelwood is central to the discussion of forest conservation in the city not only by virtue of its place among the nation’s most high-profile brown-field redevelopments, but also the fact that the neighborhood is home to fully one third of the city’s non-park forests. Discussion of “green spaces” and “green infrastructure” among city planners seems more sincere than the distortion of such terms by the industrial foresters who manage our public lands. Still, it would be a far stretch to say there is anything like an actual “re-wilding” ethic or sensibility at the government level.

How we live in our cities affects every aspect of how we live with our forests, and bringing the forest habitat into our cities can help foster a closer connection with nature. In light of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report released earlier this year, and the growing understanding of how serious the consequences of global warming are going to be, the City of Pittsburgh must set aside canopy forest and meet their own management goals for climate preparedness. Forests are our best defense against the destructive impacts of industrial pollution and global warming.

To view Pittsburgh’s Greenways and Climate Action Plan, visit these websites:

<https://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/greenways>
<https://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/climate-action-plan>



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The T4APA! campaign is led by PPT, the Philly Transit Riders Union, Amalgamated Transit Union PA Joint Conference Board, 5th Square and Transit Forward Philadelphia. Over six months, the grassroots coalition collaborated on the T4APA! platform calling for \$1.65 billion in annual dedicated payments to public transit. This call is in line with the Pennsylvania Transportation Advisory Committee’s assessment of the cost of fully-funded transit in PA to address deferred maintenance and current economic needs. The platform also lays out policies to grow ridership and equity. “Hundreds of riders and workers, from urban and rural communities across the state, have laid out a roadmap for fully-funded transit in Pennsylvania,” said Laura Chu Wiens, executive director of PPT. “The T4APA! platform turns this transit funding crisis into an opportunity for growing PA’s economy, improving our environment and growing equity among our most vulnerable communities.”

More than 95 elected officials, unions and businesses and organizations across the state—including the PA Budget and Policy Center, the Sierra Club of Pennsylvania, Urban Erie Community Development Corporation and the Scranton Area Community Foundation—have signed onto the TT4APA! platform.

Visit www.transitforallpa.org for more info.



OPN is committed to serving, informing and educating the 99% of the greater Pittsburgh area. By fulfilling this mission, OPN can influence public debate and contribute locally to the international goal of economic and social justice for all. Contact/Submissions: opnnews@gmail.com

“Paramount among the responsibilities of a Free Press is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people...”
—Justice Black
 NY Times v. United States, 403 U. S. 713 (1971)

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