



Scenic Pittsburgh

**Strategic Plan
2021-2023**

Cucumber Falls, Ohiopyle State Park
Fayette County, PA

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Mission

Scenic Pittsburgh is a nonprofit organization that protects, enhances, and promotes the scenic beauty – both natural and built – of southwestern Pennsylvania.

Mission companion text: Scenic Pittsburgh’s work is focused on the nexus where economic development, community health, and environmental and historic preservation meet.

Scenic Pittsburgh last adopted a strategic plan December 6, 2018. After adding communications staff, and after the sweeping changes to the regional nonprofit landscape in 2020, staff and leadership decided that a new iteration of the strategic plan was needed to guide the organization going forward. This document is the result.

Introduction and Summary

Program Areas and Goals

Since creating the last version of our Strategic Plan, Scenic Pittsburgh has greatly expanded its programmatic activities; expanded its staff; and is facing a fundamentally altered non-profit landscape due to COVID-19 and a reordering of priorities in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests. All of these factors have motivated us to take a fresh look at our program areas and organizational and programmatic goals, in order to better focus on our mission as we continue to expand our work and build on the foundation of our first 10 years. This Strategic Plan lays out goals for the next three years, **from 2021-2023.**

Although Scenic Pittsburgh has a number of ongoing and new programmatic efforts, fundamentally all of our activities can be considered through the lens of three program areas: 1. Advocacy and Communication; 2. Economic Development; and 3. Greenspace Development.

Below is a description of each program area and its associated programmatic goals.

1. Advocacy and Communication

Continue to lead the region in advocating for legislative solutions to prevent damage to scenic resources from threats such as billboards and excessive signage; litter, blight, and illegal dumping; poorly planned development; and destruction of historic buildings and sites.

Goals:

- Build awareness across the 10-county Pittsburgh region about the importance of preserving and leveraging scenic resources and the economic and health advantages of doing so
- Motivate community leaders and residents to act to change their zoning, policies and strategic planning documents to protect themselves
- Motivate community leaders and residents to contact and work with Scenic Pittsburgh to assist them in changing their zoning, policies and strategic planning documents to protect themselves

2. Economic Development

Accelerate economic development and recovery in southwestern Pennsylvania by forming public/private partnerships with municipalities and neighborhoods to fill the “capacity gap” in development, with a focus on low and moderate-income communities and those recovering from economic disinvestment.

Goal:

- Accelerate economic development and recovery in southwestern Pennsylvania by forming public/private partnerships with municipalities and neighborhoods to fill the “capacity gap” in development

3. Greenspace Restoration

Leverage a public/private model of greenspace restoration to create enduring and accessible greenspaces in disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city of Pittsburgh and carry that model into our 10-county region

Goal:

- Leverage a unique model of greenspace restoration to create enduring and accessible greenspaces in neighborhoods in need across our 10-county region

Organizational Goals

We have created our organizational goals for the period of 2021-2023 with a focus on expanding our capacity as an organization, especially in the areas of communication and development/fundraising.

Our current organizational goals, which all run from 2021-23, are:

Board

- Continue to strengthen and diversify our Board of Directors and its capacity to assist in fundraising and advocacy for our program goals, increasing our current board to 12 members

Staff

- Increase our use of interns for law work and communications support

Communications

- Strengthen our relationships and partnerships with PRC and Allegheny Cleanways, and reach out to other regional organizations to lay the foundation for partnerships; for example, Sustainable Pittsburgh, Tree Pittsburgh, New Sun Rising, Preservation Pittsburgh, and neighborhood and regional development and preservation groups
- Continue to strengthen our regional media presence through social media, select advertising and public relations efforts, and grow our yearly fundraising event to more than 150 attendees

Development

- Continue to build on the fundraising, communications and other organizational improvements offered as part of the chapter agreement with Scenic America, increasing our mailing list to 18,000 members over the next 3 years
- Grow our individual donor program and build relationships with new foundations; apply to at least 6 new foundations per year

- Create a corporate sponsorship program that includes sponsorship of our yearly event and continue to grow it along with our yearly event

Program Areas, Goals and Activities

Below is a detailed description of each of our three program areas, how it relates to our mission, its associated programmatic goals, and the associated projected activities over the 3-year period between 2021-2023.

Program Area 1. Advocacy and Communication

Continue to lead the region in advocating for legislative solutions to prevent damage to scenic resources from threats such as billboards and excessive signage; litter, blight, and illegal dumping; poorly planned development; and destruction of historic buildings and sites.

Problem: *We have found that many communities in our 10-county region, and even here in the City of Pittsburgh, lack the knowledge and capacity to protect themselves from threats to their scenic resources, or to fully understand their potential as assets to their economic development.*

Since our inception, Scenic Pittsburgh has been the primary force in southwestern Pennsylvania advocating for zoning ordinances and strategic planning as solutions to scenic blight, and our communication and outreach efforts continue to be the core of our work and the source of our greatest impact on the region

We work with any community in our 10-county region that needs our support, but our most intense outreach efforts are focused on communities that meet federal and state criteria for being low- to moderate-income. Scenic Pittsburgh reaches out directly to the community leaders who are experiencing pressure from threats to their scenic resources, and engages them to see the economic development potential in preserving those resources for the future. In short, we empower municipalities by leveraging their scenic resources and focusing on beauty, instead of neglecting or destroying those resources.

We are in the process of changing our communications focus to include many more online, on-demand resources and creating videos that will engage, educate and build awareness about the role scenic resources play in a thriving region and what tools are available to preserve them. Easily accessible online resources will ensure our message reaches many more overstrained municipalities and neighborhoods than we can visit in person.

Because we tend to advocate for legislative and zoning solutions as protection from threats to scenic resources, our communication must also be proactive – educating people and offering tools BEFORE threats damage their region. There is a window of opportunity for this messaging as a result of COVID and the pause in development in the region. Many communities are going through a reappraisal process and questioning their civic priorities, and they have the chance

now to create zoning and legislation that prevents the destruction of their scenic resources and prioritizes the role those resources can play in their recovery.

Goals

- Build awareness across the 10-county Pittsburgh region about the importance of preserving and leveraging scenic resources and the economic and health advantages of doing so
- Motivate community leaders and residents to act to change their zoning, policies and strategic planning documents to protect themselves
- Motivate community leaders and residents to contact and work with Scenic Pittsburgh to assist them in changing their zoning, policies and strategic planning documents to protect themselves

Activities

In 2021:

- **Monitoring and Offering Testimony.** On a monthly basis, continue monitoring zoning and development hearings across the region for projects that present a threat to the region's scenic resources; and offering expert testimony in support of protecting, preserving and promoting scenic resources when requested by members of the community
- **Solicit and Respond to Requests for Development and Zoning Advice.** Actively solicit, and respond to, requests for zoning and development advice across our 10-county region through direct outreach, as well as through our social media and other media outlets
- **Add Media to our Public Library of Resources for Protecting and Leveraging Scenic Assets and Promote These Resources to the Public**
 - Create a series of case studies on cities in the region that have capitalized on their scenic assets successfully, detailing how they have leveraged their scenic assets
 - Create a series of videos on the importance of preserving and leveraging scenic resources for the public
 - What are Scenic Resources?
 - Why Beauty Matters for Every Community
 - Zoning: How to Have a Beautiful Community
- **Expand our Outreach Through an Inaugural Webinar Series on Zoning for Town and Municipal Leaders.** We plan 3 webinars in the first year:
 - Why Zoning Matters
 - Pro-business, Pro-beauty: What to Look for in Your Zoning Code
 - Fighting Billboards: Proven Strategies
- **Continue to Grow our Scenic Pittsburgh Award Series.** A minimum of 2 awards given in 2021.

In 2022:

- **Monitoring and Offering Testimony.** On a monthly basis, continue monitoring zoning and development hearings across the region for projects that present a threat to the region's scenic resources; and offering expert testimony in support of protecting, preserving and promoting scenic resources when requested by members of the community
- **Solicit and Respond to Requests for Development and Zoning Advice.** Actively solicit, and respond to, requests for zoning and development advice across our 10-county region through direct outreach, as well as our social media and other media outlets
- **Add Media to our Public Library of Resources for Protecting and Leveraging Scenic Assets and Promote These Resources to the Public**
- **Expand our Webinar Series on Zoning for Town and Municipal Leaders** with 5 webinars planned for the second year
- **Continue to Grow our Scenic Pittsburgh Award Series** with a minimum of 2 awards given in 2022
- **Obtain funding for a part-time legal consultant focusing 100% on billboard conformance**

In 2023:

- **Monitoring and Offering Testimony.** On a monthly basis, continue monitoring zoning and development hearings across the region for projects that present a threat to the region's scenic resources; and offering expert testimony in support of protecting, preserving and promoting scenic resources when requested by members of the community
- **Solicit and Respond to Requests for Development and Zoning Advice.** Actively solicit, and respond to, requests for zoning and development advice across our 10-county region through direct outreach, as well as our social media and other media outlets
- **Add Video and Other Media to our Public Library of Resources for Protecting and Leveraging Scenic Assets and Promote These Resources to the Public**
- **Expand our Outreach Through an Ongoing Webinar Series on Zoning for Town and Municipal Leaders** with a minimum of 6 webinars in 2023
- **Continue to Grow our Scenic Pittsburgh Award Series** Continue to grow our Scenic Pittsburgh Award Series, with a minimum of 2 awards given in 2023
- **Continue to fund a part-time legal consultant focusing 100% on billboard conformance**

Program Area 2. Economic Development

Accelerate economic development and recovery in southwestern Pennsylvania by forming public/private partnerships with municipalities and neighborhoods to fill the

“capacity gap” in development, with a focus on low and moderate-income communities and those recovering from economic disinvestment.

Problem: *We have found leaders of disadvantaged communities across southwestern Pennsylvania are aware that scenic revitalization can both motivate and accelerate community renewal and reinvestment as part of a larger economic development or master plan. But these communities are often hamstrung by their low tax revenue and barebones official capacity. They don't have the staff to plan for more ambitious or comprehensive development activities beyond the most urgent, or apply for or manage the necessary funding for them.*

We identify and target communities in our 10-county region we think would benefit from our services and reach out to, engage, and directly advise and consult with them on zoning. If there is opportunity, we also work with communities on a range of comprehensive planning and beautification projects and assist them in finding funding for those projects if needed. We rely upon law interns for the required in-depth legal research on zoning ordinances.

We help disadvantaged communities by filling this “capacity gap” between their economic development needs and the reality of their funding and staff constraints. By facilitating the community planning process, helping manage their scenic improvement projects and assisting them in securing foundation grants, we allow them to capitalize on the economic development activities they are already involved in for much greater impact.

Goal

- Accelerate economic development and recovery in southwestern Pennsylvania by forming public/private partnerships with municipalities and neighborhoods to fill the “capacity gap” in development

Activities

In 2021

- Using economic and census data, **identify and target communities in need in our 10-county region** and reach out to a minimum of 20 communities
- **Directly advise and consult with at-need communities on zoning and comprehensive planning**, engaging with 3 communities minimum
- **Directly advise and consult with communities on anti-blight, beautification and scenic resource preservation and promotion projects**, engaging with 3 communities minimum

In 2022:

- Using economic and census data, **identify and target communities in need in our 10-county region** and reach out to a minimum of 20 communities
- **Directly advise and consult with at-need communities on zoning and comprehensive planning**, engaging with 5 communities minimum
- **Directly advise and consult with communities on anti-blight, beautification and scenic resource preservation and promotion projects**, engaging with 5 communities

minimum

In 2023:

- **Using economic and census data, identify and target communities in need in our 10-county region** and reach out to a minimum of 20 communities
- **Directly advise and consult with at-need communities on zoning and comprehensive planning**, engaging with 5 communities minimum
- **Directly advise and consult with communities on anti-blight, beautification and scenic resource preservation and promotion projects**, engaging with 5 communities minimum

Program Area 3: Greenspace Restoration

Leverage a public/private model of greenspace restoration to create enduring and accessible greenspaces in disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city of Pittsburgh and carry that model into our 10-county region

Problem: *There is a growing recognition that green spaces, especially in urban areas, play an outsized role in creating economic opportunity and promoting quality of life for community residents. Less affluent neighborhoods tend to have less immediate access to greenspace and parks, yet there are often neglected and potential greenspaces located near or in these neighborhoods that have not been restored or developed for reasons that range from a shortage of funding to bureaucratic inaction. Neglect of this type of greenspace means many of these spaces end up as informal dumping grounds or overgrown with non-native plants.*

In view of these circumstances, we believe there is room for non-profits to step forward to clean up and expand publicly accessible greenspace using a public/private model.

This type of project would serve as a model for public/private greenspace development of vacant land across the region, especially in areas that might present obstacles for development. The focus would be on making the greenspace trash-free, useable and accessible quickly, rather than on adding costly amenities. We would also enlist the support of neighborhood organizations in order to raise funds to maintain the space into the future, and ensure the engagement of residents.

We are currently restoring a series of contiguous lots in the Fineview neighborhood as a greenspace pilot project. Scenic Pittsburgh owns one of these lots outright, and is working with the city to acquire the rest. The Fineview space is a good example of the type of neighborhood that could benefit from further greenspace. While other nearby neighborhoods on the Northside are experiencing renewal, Fineview remains blighted. Nearly 20% of housing units are vacant and the median sales price of a home is \$16,000. This predominantly African American neighborhood that has been experiencing steady population decline. But it is also a prime neighborhood for future development, poised just above the popular Mexican War Streets, near downtown, and with many parcels offering stunning views.

Goal

- Leverage a unique model of greenspace restoration to create enduring and accessible greenspaces in neighborhoods in need across our 10-county region

Activities

In 2021:

- **Continue to improve our Fineview greenspace, with a public fundraising and awareness campaign planned for 2021** and partnering with neighborhood groups to ensure it is maintained
- **Obtain ownership of all contiguous city-owned property around the Fineview Greenspace through conservatorship**
- **Identify 10 prospective sites for expanding this greenspace development model in Pittsburgh and beyond**

In 2022:

- **Continue to improve our Fineview greenspace with public fundraising and awareness campaign, including obtaining funding for additional amenities such as benches and viewing areas**
- **Establish an additional greenspace restoration project at an additional site and begin to raise funds for its restoration and establish partnerships with neighborhood groups**

In 2023:

- **Continue to improve our Fineview greenspace with public fundraising and awareness campaign, including obtaining funding for additional amenities such as benches**
- **Continue to improve our newest greenspace, with a public fundraising and awareness campaign planned and partnering with neighborhood groups to ensure it is maintained**

Organizational Goals

Below are our organizational goals planned for 2021-23 and their relationship to our mission. **We have Board, Staff, Communications and Development Goals.**

Board Goal

- **Continue to strengthen and diversify our Board of Directors and its capacity to assist in fundraising and advocacy for our program goals, increasing our current board to 12 members**

In the previous strategic plan, it was resolved to expand the organization's board and seek board members that matched the following criteria:

- Ability and willingness to assist with fundraising and revenue generation
- Knowledge about the issues central to Scenic Pittsburgh's mission
- Greater diversity in gender, age, race and ethnicity
- More representation from the service area outside the city of Pittsburgh
- Ability and willingness to assist in advocating for Scenic Pittsburgh positions to government decisionmakers
- Membership in partner groups and organizations with mutual interest

These criteria continue to be what the organization looks for in prospective board members.

The Scenic Pittsburgh Board needs to move into a larger role when it comes to fundraising and organizational support as the organization continues to grow.

Our Board now stands at 11 members, so just under our 12-member goal. We are currently engaged in the process of adding another board member through the organization Y22, which matches younger people with organizations, in order to further diversify our board representation.

As agreed in the previous strategic plan, the Board went to 3 meetings a year at the beginning of 2020. We have an almost complete complement of Board members, and we have established two working board committees: Bylaws and Board Development. Updates to the Board continue to happen at least 3 times per year.

We continue to develop our board with an eye towards their qualifications and diversity, and continue to develop our board committees.

Staff Goals

Our current staff goal:

- **Increase our use of interns for law work and communications support**

Our work is increasingly legal in nature, and our expanding staff requires additional support. Legal interns are needed year-round, and we are encouraging donors to consider this way of supporting our mission. Due to a generous donation that provided a legal intern through the Pitt School of Law, Alex Thompson joined staff in the fall of 2020. The organization also retained a communications support intern from Public Allies/Americorps from fall 2019 to spring 2020.

Communications Goals

Current Communication goals:

- Strengthen our relationships and partnerships with PRC and Allegheny Cleanways, and reach out to other regional organizations to lay the foundation for partnerships; for example, Sustainable Pittsburgh, Tree Pittsburgh, New Sun Rising, Preservation Pittsburgh, and neighborhood and regional development and preservation groups
- Continue to strengthen our regional media presence through social media, select advertising and public relations efforts
- Grow our yearly fundraising event to more than 150 attendees

Goal: Strengthen our relationships and partnerships with PRC and Allegheny Cleanways, and reach out to other regional organizations to lay the foundation for partnerships; for example, Sustainable Pittsburgh, Tree Pittsburgh, New Sun Rising, Preservation Pittsburgh, and neighborhood and regional development and preservation groups.

Using social media, as well as attending open meetings and periodic small meetings, Scenic Pittsburgh has recently expanded its relationships with neighborhood groups and partner organizations and will continue to build on those relationships. Scenic Pittsburgh is now a member of both the Sustainability Pittsburgh network and the Greenspace Alliance, and we maintain strong relationships with both the Pennsylvania Resources Council and Allegheny Cleanways to mutually support our organizations' messaging and goals. We also partner with regional economic development and environmental groups whenever possible to magnify our collective impact.

Goal: Continue to strengthen our regional media presence through select advertising and public relations efforts.

Our Scenic Pittsburgh awards launched in 2019 with our first award to the City of Connellsville, an event that garnered a great deal of earned PR. In 2020 so far, we have placed advertising in both a Pittsburgh Magazine monthly newsletter, and sponsored content in NEXTPittsburgh online publication. We regularly boost popular Facebook posts and are planning a series of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram ads to gain followers. We plan to continue with these strategies and actions over the next 3 years, with goal of at least tripling our social media followings and expanding our use of social media advertising.

Plans to attend and table more events are still being developed – the COVID pandemic has also interfered in this goal. However, we have developed our collateral, created swag (branded pens and soon, t-shirts), and will return to tabling in 2021.

Communication to our followers has also expanded, with a quarterly newsletter, periodic updates, and a fully developed welcome email series now part of the communications plan.

Scenic Pittsburgh has integrated its website, its CRM, and its digital engagement platform with Scenic America's system. This has vastly expanded our communications and list-building

capabilities. Social media channels continue to increase followers. We plan to add a YouTube channel with in-house produced videos by the end of 2020.

Current media and social media advertising budget: \$2k annually

Grow our yearly fundraising event to more than 250 attendees by 2023.

Our annual fundraising event in 2019 sold out and raised around \$5,000, considerably more than its costs. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic prevented us from capitalizing on that momentum. The hope is that the annual event will return in some form in 2021, possibly with social distancing precautions. We will also be developing a corporate sponsorship plan which we will introduce in 2021.

Development Goals

Our current development goals:

- Continue to build on the fundraising, communications and other organizational improvements offered as part of the chapter agreement with Scenic America, increasing our mailing list to more than 25,000 members by 2023 and our annual fundraising goal of at least \$350,000, increasing to \$400,000 in 2022 and 2023 to support our part-time billboard compliance position
- Grow our individual donor program and build relationships with new foundations; apply to at least 7 new foundations per year by 2023
- Create and grow a corporate sponsorship program that includes sponsorship of our yearly event

The fundraising landscape since spring of 2020 has been considerably more challenging as a result of COVID and a shift of many foundations towards a more overtly racial justice focus.

However, our partnership with Scenic America means we have had the assistance of a professional development advisor since summer of 2019. Since then, we have tripled the amount of grants we have applied for per year and continue to become more sophisticated and focused on how we approach foundations.

We have also expanded to offer more intensive zoning work which can be underwritten by foundations, as in our current project in Latrobe.

At the same time, through efforts with Scenic America to expand our supporter base, we expect to have a supporter list of more than 10,000 by early 2021. This will allow us to greatly increase our individual donor program as well as engage many more supporters in our work. Individual fundraising is expected to continue to grow from 2021-23 as we continue to build our supporters.

Finally, once we can go back to live events, hopefully in 2021, we will introduce a corporate sponsorship package in order to offset the cost of our annual Brews for Views event.

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