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Sustainable Design

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### A Comparison of Atlantic Station and Pittsburgh, PA

With the increasing population of U.S. cities appears the correspondence of increasing pollution and suburban sprawl. This sprawl then causes increased reliance on automobiles, more traffic congestion and emission of greenhouse gases. Some city planners and developers acknowledge this problem and seek to address it. Two examples of such cities are Atlanta, GA and Pittsburgh, PA. These two cities have acknowledged their sprawl and industrial pollution, and have rectified the issues by promoting smart growth through the establishment of smart cities.

Atlanta, GA was a poorly planned city plagued by traffic congestion and horrific pollution resulting from it. The ozone smog levels were so severe that in 1998 a federal judge ordered a moratorium on road projects requiring federal approval until local agencies improved the problem (Benfield 16). There were sixty-nine ozone alert days in 1999, and Atlanta was classified as a “serious” ozone nonattainment area under the Clean Air Act (Pouncey 248). In terms of traffic, the city is scattered over an area the size of the state of Delaware which resulted in the longest average commute in the nation for its workers (Benfield 16).

Atlanta also faced the problem of sprawl. For every 1% increase in population growth, a 10-20% increase in developed land resulted (Benfield 17). City planners and developers acknowledged a problem with this evidence. The idea of a smart city within Atlanta arose in order to decrease automobile dependence and increase air quality; however planners and developers first needed to overcome a major obstacle.

A conducive location for this smart city within a city existed, but it was cut off from midtown Atlanta by two major highways. In order to connect the smart city to midtown, developers needed to build a bridge. However, construction of a bridge would violate the 1998

moratorium. In order to resolve this problem, developers sought the help of the EPA (Benfield 17).

The EPA was able to grant exemption from the moratorium due to Project XL. Project XL stands for “excellence in leadership”. It was created in 1995 under the Clinton Administration to allow regulatory flexibility for projects that would actually better environmental conditions of an area (Pouncey 249). Thus, the bridge was built, for \$38 million dollars, funded by the Georgia Department of Transportation, and the smart city by the name of Atlantic Station was established (Pouncey 249).

Atlantic Station was constructed on a 138 acre tract of land in downtown Atlanta. For the past century, a steel mill resided on the land called Atlantic Steel. In the 1990s, the steel industry plummeted. Jim Jacoby of Jacoby Development, Inc. found opportunity in the site and purchased it in 1997 for the use of establishing a “mini-city of mixed land uses” (Benfield 17). He ensured that the land got cleaned, and he created a new urban center of mixed uses which increased tax revenues from \$300,000/ year to \$30,000,000/ year (Emison 152). It contains parks, lakes, 3,200 residential units, a high-technology center with 4-5 million sq. ft. of office space, four hotels with 1,000 rooms, and a 1.5 million sq. ft. area of shopping and entertainment space (Benfield 19). Figure 1 below is a map of the property and the amenities it contains.

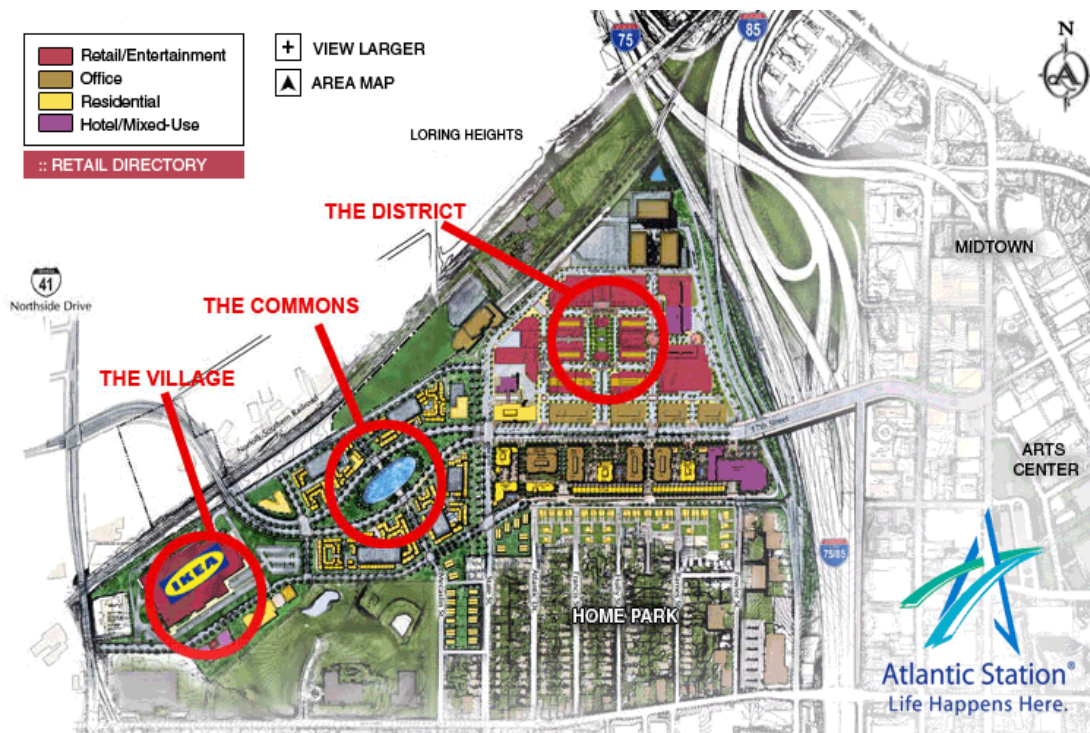


Figure 1: photo taken from <http://www.atlanticstation.com/site.php>

Upon overcoming the complications in the development of Atlantic Station such as site clean up and institutional controls, a number of benefits of smart-growth have been experienced. It was a result of brownfield redevelopment which promotes actions against sprawl and the utilization of open spaces, it embodies mixed-use development which enables people to walk or ride a bicycle to all places of interest, it provides access to transportation around the area and to midtown Atlanta, the community was involved in its planning, and it increased ambient air quality (Benfield 17).

Pittsburgh, PA is another city that has combated sprawl and promoted smart growth. Much like Atlanta, it was a home of the steel industry. With the decline of the industry in the 1970s and 80s, steel mills were abandoned and population in the city decreased since few jobs remained (Dettore 1). Homestead, a town situated southeast across the Monongahela River from Pittsburgh, (see the star on figure 2 for location) experienced a population decrease of 18%



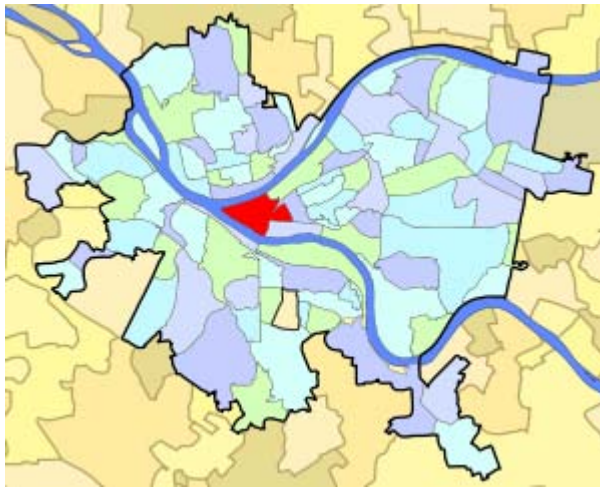
within ten years (Perkins 508). Thus with the abandonment of the residents and the steel mills, the question arose as to what should be done with the resulting abandoned land. The Urban Redevelopment Authority working with private developers, the

community, state government, and the private sector utilized the opportunity to sensibly develop the abandoned land (Dettore 2). The land was valuable in that it was flat riverside acreage with abundant resources and means for transportation (Dettore 1).

The latter groups collaborated to promote the redevelopment of four riverfront brownfield sites: Washington’s Landing at Herr’s Landing, Pittsburgh Technology Center, South Side Works, and Summerset at Frick Park (Dettore 2). Each site was developed on brownfields abandoned by former industry, mainly steel (Dettore 2).

Washington's Landing was the first project. It is a forty-two acre island on the western bank of the Allegheny River, shown in Figure 3 below. For over 100 years it was utilized as a

Figure 3: taken from <http://upload.wikimedia.org>



rail stop for livestock and as a meat packing center. It was shut down in the 1970s along with the rest Pittsburgh's industry. The abandonment of the site signified a large amount of toxic waste. There were over thirty four acres of abandoned stockyards, railroad tracks, and other debris. Worse than the debris was the remnants of noxious waste materials, traces of polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and

contaminated ground water. The clean up cost \$2.5 dollars but was hazard free by 1990. The new center housed sites for commerce, manufacturing, recreation, and upscale housing. It has created over 2,100 jobs as well as more than \$1 in revenues for the city for a site that used generate barely any taxes (Dettore 2).

The Pittsburgh Technology Center exists now on the former Eliza Furnace and Mill site. It lies on forty-eight acres along the Monongahela River. The Urban Redevelopment Authority purchased the site in 1983. A comprehensive cleanup occurred. Ferrous iron cyanide was found twenty five feet below the surface, along with tar pits, 2000 gallons of waste oil, and 420,000 gallons of oily water. Now the site is home to an advanced academic and corporate research facility that generates 1,000 jobs and more than \$1 million in tax revenues (Dettore 2).

South Side Works resides across the Monongahela from the Pittsburgh Technology Center. The site formerly belonged to LTV Steel. The city purchased the site in 1993 and after the cleaning of iron cyanide metals and PCBs, established a mixed-use development of entertainment, retail and offices, housing, research, and distribution. Upon its completion, it is expected to provide approximately 5,400 jobs. The site generates \$3 million in annual real estate taxes and will generate over \$8 million once completed (Dettore 3).

Lastly, Summerset at Frick Park is worth mentioning. It resides on a site known as Nine Mile Run, a former 238 acre steel mill slag dump. In order to redevelop the site, 600,000 cubic yards of slag had to be stabilized, a stream that bisects the site needed purification, and 105 acres of the site required reclamation and revegetation. A part of the reclamation entailed connecting the site directly to the Monongahela River. It is now a residential neighborhood with 694 housing units on 138 acres of prepared land and generates \$2.4 million in property taxes for the city (Dettore 3).

There are a number of similarities between the two cities' brownfield redevelopment. There are also differences, but not too many. One difference between the two redevelopment plans is that there is more acreage involved in Pittsburgh's redevelopment; however, that is on account to having multiple redevelopment sites opposed to just one in Atlanta. Another difference is that Pittsburgh is less populated than Atlanta (Pittsburgh (city) Pennsylvania) and thus while its pollution was terrible, it was not as bad as Atlanta's. The Pittsburgh project lacked the initial major obstacle of the approval of a bridge, and thus the EPA was not forced to play as large of a role as was required in Atlanta's redevelopment.

There are many more similarities than differences between the two redevelopment plans. Both cities utilized abandoned brownfields as sites for development. Both are sound examples of smart growth and mixed-use development. They both include feasible transportation links for residents and employees via public transportation, bicycles, or walking. Nine Mile Run provides the East End of Pittsburgh with public transportation to downtown Pittsburgh. The bridge connecting Atlantic Station with midtown Atlanta provides sidewalks for walking and bicycle paths for riding bicycle riding to midtown. They both embrace technology and established sites for technology and research. Community involvement and input played a role in both in that residents of the community were encouraged to provide their opinions and feedback. The land for both plans was purchased in or around the 1990s after the downfall of the steel industry. Both cities' redevelopment plans maintained the ability to provide jobs for residents, and both plans generated a large amount of revenue for their respective cities.

In conclusion, the projects exhibit some differences, they are more similar to each other than different. They are both explicit examples of smart growth, and both were successful

endeavors. Both utilize their respective sites in a much more environmentally sustainable manner than their predecessors.

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### **Pictures:**

Figure 1: <http://www.atlanticstation.com/site.php>

Figure 2: <http://www.atatrail.org/maps/images/map1.jpg>

Figure 3:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/91/Pgh\\_locator\\_central\\_business\\_district.svg/300px-Pgh\\_locator\\_central\\_business\\_district.svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/91/Pgh_locator_central_business_district.svg/300px-Pgh_locator_central_business_district.svg.png).