



E-Blast

December 2005

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What's So Great About The City?



Did you know that the Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium is open every day of the year except Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day? The 77-acre facility is home to thousands of animals representing hundreds of

Greetings!

Welcome to the final E-Blast of 2005. We wish you a joyous holiday season, and hope that you enjoy our neighborhood feature on New Kensington and learning about how the Complete Streets movement can benefit you and your neighborhood.

● **Workshop on January 18th**

For those of you thinking about moving or growing your business, we hope you can attend our next "Right Size It" workshop on Wednesday, January 18, 2006. Typically small, these workshops offer the opportunity to get your questions answered by a real estate professional and will help you determine next steps in the process of finding space for your business or organization.

Topics include determining whether you're ready to move; how much money will be needed; lease vs. buy decisions; major issues to consider when choosing a space; and more. Cost is \$35 per organization.

[Visit our website or click here for workshop details and registration form.](#)

● **Complete Streets**

There are many efforts dedicated to improving life in our nation's neighborhoods-Main Streets programs, bike programs, walkable communities, organizations aimed at reducing obesity-but one that brings these ideas together is the



Complete Streets movement. Complete Streets, as defined by the Complete Streets Coalition are, "designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street". The design can vary according to location and type of road, but generally includes features such as sidewalks, wide shoulders or bike lanes, special

diverse species. Committed to education, research and wildlife conservation, the

Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium is actively involved in 25 Species Survival Plans and proudly exhibits 32 threatened or endangered species. The Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium is one of only six major zoo and aquarium combinations in the country.
(Source: www.pittsburghzoo.com)

We encourage you to check out the zoo in your city. Even in cold weather seasons, zoos remain open and showcase animals in a somewhat different light than in warmer months.

Picture Credited to Smithsonian's National Zoo.
See more at <http://nationalzoo.si.edu>.

[Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium](#)

bus lanes, raised crosswalks, and audible pedestrian signals.

The Complete Streets Coalition is comprised of about 16 groups including the AARP, American Bikes, American Society of Landscape Architects, America Walks, and the Institute of Transportation Engineers. These groups work to raise awareness and to implement policies, mostly with local and state governments, to make complete streets a reality. Currently, there is no policy in place in Pennsylvania, but the Complete Streets website offers information on how other groups have lobbied for them and existing policies that have worked well.

The most obvious benefit of having complete streets is that it gives people the choice to walk or bike. This has a number of benefits in itself. According to one study cited on the Complete Streets website, 43% of people with a safe place to walk near their home met recommended activity levels compared to only 27% of people without a safe place to walk near their home, and residents are 65% more likely to walk in a neighborhood with sidewalks. Another study found that there was a 23% increase in bike traffic after the installation of a bike lane. With the needs of bikers and pedestrians met, pedestrian risk was found to drop by 28%. The benefits reaped can extend beyond the neighborhood level, too, because both air quality and traffic conditions improve if more people choose to bike and walk.

At Cool Space Locator we see another benefit of complete streets - the opportunity for greater connections between residents, businesses, and neighborhoods. While the complete streets movement is geared towards people's health, safety, and enjoyment in any place (whether it's suburban, rural, or urban), Cool Space Locator helps to promote complete streets in urban areas by helping companies locate in walkable neighborhoods that are easily accessed by all (even those walking or biking).

Complete Streets Coalition

- **Featured Neighborhood: New Kensington**

Just 17 miles from downtown Pittsburgh, east along Route 28, New Kensington sits along the Allegheny River. New Kensington's recent history parallels most other cities and towns in the region. The demise of the local steel industry sent it into a



tailspin of negative economic shock and symptomatic aftershocks. In its historic downtown area reside just a few businesses amongst the decay that has crept over many of the retail and industrial spaces in the area. Still,

there is a group of optimistic and motivated people working to build upon what is left there, and they are gathering momentum.

New Kensington is the birthplace of aluminum, developed by Alcoa (Aluminum Company of America), which is still the global leader in the aluminum market. Although this multi-national corporation has long since left the Westmoreland County town, it's left an indelible mark, not just on the psyche of its people but also on its architecture. "New Ken", as the town is affectionately known, has water fronts and hillsides replete with industrial edifices left behind by Alcoa; the same goes for the town of Arnold, which is surrounded by New Ken (except on the river side).

New Ken's 3.8 square mile area and population of 14,701 has been left with the significant void of having a major corporate tenant leave town. But residents and the Redevelopment Authority of New Kensington are actively and optimistically working to recognize and build upon the town's many remaining assets. There are over 57 acres of parks, plentiful affordable housing, numerous adult education opportunities (including a branch campus of Penn State University), and a diverse population that includes many Greek, Polish, Italian, and Syrian people. Each summer and fall, residents and visitors alike enjoy food festivals featuring these diverse cultures.

Thanks to Kim McAfoose and Sharon & Tom Resek for their assistance in writing this article.

● **New Kensington Railroad Development**

Perhaps New Kensington's most progressive new action item, their commuter train, is actually the reimplementa-



tion of a line that ran up until 1964 when ridership dropped so low that they had to discontinue it. Still, the tracks remain and the old train station, which had sat and been used only as an industrial loading dock since that time, has now been totally refurbished and is ready for ticketing (pictured above). They've even had a self-propelled railcar that they are interested in come to town for a personal viewing. The train would travel into the Strip District of Pittsburgh and would hopefully serve many stops in between these two terminals.

This initiative runs under the label of Allegheny River Transportation Initiative and is now working towards acquiring its 501(c)3 non-profit status. They already have Allegheny County involved and are looking to gain further regional support. The potential for alleviating current

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traffic issues on Route 28 is a very attractive selling point for regional agencies. An investigation is underway to calculate the return on investment of the project with potential passenger numbers, etc. so that they can move towards the purchase of the trains.

With the commuter train running, New Kensington, with its affordable housing and low tax rate, could tie itself closer to Pittsburgh as a bedroom community. Also, the opening of the Pittsburgh Mills mega-mall just across the river from New Kensington would benefit from the ease of traveling this line.

- **Redevelopment Authority of New Kensington**

Kim McAfoose, Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority of New Kensington, is the spearhead for much of the revitalization initiatives happening in the town. Along with Sharon Resek, Coordinator of the Weed and Seed program, the Redevelopment Authority has managed to put together an impressive list of accomplishments.



Recent support from the federal Weed & Seed program has gone a long way towards creating a safer environment in which to begin revitalization projects in the town. The Redevelopment Authority has begun to make strong plans for economic development. Their focus is on knocking out decayed spaces, rebuilding local economics through zoning, and drawing light industrial ventures and a number of flagship projects, including riverfront redevelopment and a commuter train to Pittsburgh.

With the help of [Blueprint Communities](#), a Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh initiative that works to revitalize older communities through leadership development and consulting services, interest groups have analyzed the New Kensington and Arnold landscape to document their assets and develop plans on how best to utilize or build upon them through a systematic strategic planning process. Residents of these cities listed their most valued assets and cited their historic district with its many character-rich buildings, their beautiful senior center (at one time Alcoa's headquarters for their Kensington Ware line of products), the commercial tax relief zones, low county taxes, affordable homes, and the existing marina for Allegheny River access as a number of examples.

The Redevelopment Authority is taking a systematic approach to their economic development and revitalization planning. Phase I involved commercial and housing assessment and action. They have been working hard to rehabilitate or demolish decaying properties. They've

succeeded in tearing down 101 unsafe buildings in less than 3 years with many more to come down soon. They have done this with great consideration of current tenants, helping them to relocate when necessary. Phase II has already begun and is focused on bringing life back into the historic downtown area along their 4th and 5th Avenue corridors. This step involves projects such as the railroad station and commuter train, their downtown enterprise tax zone, and attention to beautification of the area by repairing sidewalks, trimming trees, etc. In the process, empty spaces such as the old Daytola Theatre and Tile City building will hopefully find new tenants to fill in the holes between Bartolacci's Tailor Shop, Catoris Candies, and their old bingo hall (pictured).

● **About Us**

Cool Space Locator, a project of the Tides Center (PA), is a non-profit real estate organization that connects neighborhoods, properties, and businesses in the revitalization of urban communities. We work in the community development realm to promote revitalization of urban areas and walkable communities and match companies with cool urban spaces to create a sustainable future. Aside from working as a licensed real estate brokerage to help companies find space, we work with government, economic and community development agencies, and commercial property owners to help boost the growth of office-based jobs in the great urban commercial districts of Pittsburgh. We are supported by:

- Richard King Mellon Foundation
- The Heinz Endowments
- The Pittsburgh Foundation
- Roy A. Hunt Foundation
- The Urban Redevelopment Authority of the City of Pittsburgh
- City of Pittsburgh, Mayor's Office