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Signage in urban districts make for unique neighborhoods. Oakland's neon district resulted from an effort to improve façades along the sidewalks of Fifth

**Greetings!**

Welcome to the October 2004 edition of the Cool Space Locator E-Blast. This month we bring you information about Oakland, our featured neighborhood, we tell you about BIDs and Smart Growth, and invite you to nominate a cool space for Cool Space Awards 2005.

Enjoy, and as always, we appreciate your feedback!

• **The City is for Kids!**

*Oakland is the home to 11 schools, from pre-school through higher education. As part of our neighborhood feature on Oakland this month, we welcome the following submission from Minrose Straussman, a middle school student at the Frick International Studies Academy Middle School.*



Oakland is the ultimate school hangout. It's where all of the 'big kids' hang after school. Frick ISA Middle School, Schenley High School, and the University of Pittsburgh as well as Carnegie Mellon are all located in Oakland. At all times during the day you can see kids walking around. Me and my friends' favorite places to hang are:

- The Original Hot Dog Shop. An Oakland staple for years, it serves the greasiest pizza and fries around....but it is SO GOOD!
- The CD Warehouse. They have CDs for almost nothing, so you can use whatever is left over of your lunch money to get a couple of cool CDs.
- Pamela's Pancake House. Every morning after swim practice, the team goes to Pamela's to revive themselves after waking up at 5:30. There's no better place to do it.
- The Crazy Mocha. They make a fabulous vanilla steamer and there is no better place to stay warm on a cold winter

and Forbes Avenues, a virtual highway traveling through the heart of Oakland. Neon and 3D signs are a catchy way to provide visibility to both pedestrian and vehicle traffic!

Several restaurants that have joined the neon trend in Oakland are Joe Mama's Italian Deluxe, Dave & Andy's Ice Cream, The Original Hot Dog Shop, Fuel & Fuddle, and Q'Doba's Mexican Restaurant.

What do you love about your city? If you have a photograph of urban life that you would like to see featured here, please send it to us, and be sure to tell us what you love about urban living.

day. Plus, it's a great place to pretend to be an artsy college student, which is always fun.

Oakland is filled with cool hangouts and it's a good place to people watch or just chill with your friends. There are so many other places to go, we've only touched on Oakland's coolest places to be, so go check it out for yourself!

Thanks to Minrose Straussman and her friends for contributing this article to provide us with the "younger" students view of Oakland!

### • **Cool Space Awards 2005: Nomination Forms Now Available**

The Cool Space Locator invites you to nominate a space or building for a 2005 Cool Space Award. We know that locating a business in an urban area is not always the path of least resistance. Higher development costs, parking challenges, and uncertain investment returns are issues faced by all urban pioneers.

Spaces that are eligible for Cool Space Awards exist in walkable communities in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The following additional characteristics may describe your eligible cool space:

- It may be located in a formerly underutilized commercial building, industrial building, or large warehouse
- It may be part of a mixed-use development
- It may be located above a retail storefront or on a main street
- It may make use of a building's distinctive character
- It may have lots of natural light, vibrant interiors, and an open floor plan
- It may utilize green building techniques

I invite you to visit the Cool Space Awards website for further details on the awards program and to download a nomination form. We look forward to receiving the nomination of your cool space!

### Cool Space Awards 2005

#### • **Featured Neighborhood: Oakland**

Oakland, a community in the City of Pittsburgh, is the third largest employment center in Pennsylvania, after Philadelphia and Downtown Pittsburgh. There are over 100,000 people daily in Oakland - as students, employees, residents, and visitors to the universities, hospitals and many cultural amenities that Oakland



has to offer. While "meds and eds" are a big draw for this Pittsburgh community, Oakland has so much more.

Oakland is home to high-tech research companies and as a newly designated Keystone Innovation Zone, technology students will be nourished to develop into full-fledged companies. In addition to the high-tech field, Oakland is home to a variety of businesses ranging from small start-up firms of one and two employees to larger companies like RAND Corporation, an international non-partisan think tank, which is currently expanding their Oakland offices from 70 to 200 employees. The retail businesses and restaurants cater to all types - you can grab a burrito or an ice cream cone for lunch, purchase jewelry, clothing, or a CD, get a tattoo, and then shop for a Vespa at the only dealer in the region.

The business community and property owners are very forward-thinking - they have to be to meet the demand of college students, one of the most sophisticated consumer markets out there! Oakland certainly has the population, but the challenge for businesses is to effectively market themselves to this population to get them in the door. High real estate costs in the neighborhood mean that retail businesses must be savvy; "junky" retail stores will not survive Oakland.

Oakland is the cultural center of Pittsburgh with a huge focus on the arts and a large number of international residents. Over 20 ethnic restaurants offer international foods ranging from Thai, African, Vegan, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Greek, Italian, Middle Eastern, and Korean, and serve as not only places to eat for Oakland employees and students, but as community meeting places for international residents far from home. Over 17 houses of worship serve Christian, Greek Orthodox, and Islamic religions, and Oakland is home to the only Muslim Mosque in the city. Terina Hicks of the Oakland BID sees Oakland as a big melting pot. "There's just so much to offer everyone!"

Families and residents in Oakland love that they can walk to anything and everything - museums, schools, shops, work, hospitals, parks - and since Oakland is a major transportation hub of the region they can get anywhere without needing a car, making it a true urban environment.

The challenge, according to Georgia Petropoulos, Executive Director of the Oakland BID, is to get more adults to see Oakland, not just as a college town, but as a great place for all. She thinks that many adults remember Oakland from their days as a student and have kept those same perceptions without realizing the tremendous

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amount of amenities offered to people of all ages. She feels that "Oakland is all to all people". While it is a place for more than just college students, the universities contribute by producing many future artists, medical practitioners, doctors, and entrepreneurs that live and work in Oakland". So, if you were a college student in Oakland or experienced the neighborhood many years ago, it is time to go back and get the whole experience!

Thanks to Georgia Petropoulos, Terina Jett Hicks, and Alex Coyne of the Oakland Business Improvement District for their input to this article.

- **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)**

How can traditional community business districts remain competitive in this age of megastores, Mall of America, and online shopping mania? By providing better products, not "a bunch of junky retail". But how do you



finance, on an ongoing basis, the investments that keep a traditional business district fresh and continually appealing to customers? One option is to develop a Business Improvement District (BID). There are over 400 BIDs currently operating in the United States, from San Diego to New York City to Washington DC to Milwaukee to Pittsburgh.

A BID is a district in which the commercial property owners have agreed to a special assessment on their property in order to provide a pool of funds to make self-determined investments in their district. The municipality provides its power to raise and collect revenues, which are then passed on to the BID. The key to success is the public-private partnership so that resources are used to provide services that the municipality doesn't, such as marketing, events promotion, enhanced cleaning and security, and really anything else that the group decides they want to invest in to make their district inviting to visitors and patrons.

Three primary advantages that a BID offers a community are 1) additional services that improve the business environment, 2) strengthened economic capacity resulting from partnerships among management of commercial and retail services, and 3) a predictable and reliable source of local funding available to the immediate community.

As explained by Paul R. Levy in his paper "Paying for the Public Life", "BIDs seek to make our cities livable and competitive again. Cleaning, safety, marketing and

parking programs are only a *means* to this end."

## **Oakland BID**

The Oakland Business Improvement District (OBID) encompasses roughly 50 blockfaces along Fifth and Forbes Avenue, between Craft Avenue and Bigelow Boulevard, uniting approximately 80 property owners, 135 businesses, the University of Pittsburgh, UPMC Health System, Carlow University, Magee Women's Hospital, and Phipps Conservatory to plan and implement improvements in central Oakland. OBID is "dedicated to improving the cleanliness, appearance, and perception of safety in Oakland, bringing about revitalization, preserving Oakland's unique commercial environment, and undertaking marketing and development initiatives to make Oakland a vibrant destination for visitors, residents, owners, employees, and students." The main services that OBID provides are cleaning of the sidewalks, public safety, and the removal of graffiti; since its founding in 1999, crime, graffiti, and trash have decreased dramatically. OBID is funded through its bid tax on property owners, contributions from several Oakland institutions, a grant from Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority, and charitable donations.

In Pittsburgh, a BID is formed with approval from at least 75% of the commercial property owners and needs approval of the City Council. The BID has authority for 5 years, at which time it can then be renewed at the discretion of the Council. Oakland BID has just this year been unanimously approved to continue their operations, both by City Council and the property owners! We applaud their efforts in the revitalization of one of our most important city business districts.

### The Oakland BID

- **What is Smart Growth?**

In the realm of Economic and Community Development, we often forget that our buzz words are not well known outside of the field. Smart growth is one of those terms that is extremely important, and yet we hear from many people that don't know what it is! Smart growth focuses on making land use planning and decisions in consideration of regional efficiency, environmental protection, and fiscal responsibility (3). It is development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment by providing a framework for communities to make informed decisions about how and where they want to grow (1). It is in sharp contrast to much of the suburban development we see today, where single-use low-density housing districts are the norm and where there is little reason to seek alternative transportation

other than getting into a car to travel anywhere.

Smart growth makes it possible for communities to grow in ways that support economic development and jobs; create strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial, and transportation options; and achieve healthy communities that provide families with a clean environment. No longer is it necessary to separate residential communities from polluting industries and businesses. "Improved environmental regulation and private sector innovation mean that many businesses are now cleaner than they were eighty years ago when zoning was first introduced to separate land uses, thereby eliminating much of the need for their strict separation from homes and schools"(1). More and more communities are recognizing the need for smart growth. "The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) estimates that between 2001 and 2002, the number of smart growth developments increased by 26 percent, and that by December 2002, 472 smart growth developments had been completed" (2).

The following smart growth principles "illustrate the characteristics associated with healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities that offer their residents choices of how and where to live" (1).

1. Mix land uses
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable communities
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

Visit Smart Growth Online to learn more and to download or request copies of "Getting to Smart Growth" and "Getting to Smart Growth II".

Sources:

- (1) Smart Growth Network. Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation.
- (2) Smart Growth Network. Getting to Smart Growth II: 100 More Policies for Implementation.
- (3) Green, Gary Paul and Anna Haines. Asset Building and Community Development. Sage Publications, Inc.: 2002.

[Smart Growth Online](#)

- **About Us**

Cool Space Locator, a project of the Tides Center (PA), is a non-profit that helps find locations for office based organizations in Pittsburgh's urban core. Aside from working directly with companies to 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
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