

REPORT ON THE UNIVERSITY SENATE PLENARY

October 23, 2008

***Improving the Quality of Life in Oakland:
Enhancing University-Community Partnerships***

**Submitted by
The Community Relations Committee
of the University Senate**

Introduction

Over the past several years, the Senate Community Relations Committee (CRC) has become more aware of and involved in discussions and initiatives to address a range of campus-community issues including pedestrian safety, building code enforcement, trash and litter, and panhandling. In addition, the CRC has been informed about major Oakland and University supported initiatives, such as Schenley Plaza, the Boulevard of the Allies Bridge replacement, and pedestrian improvements in the Oakland business corridor. Through these discussions and initiatives, the CRC has also strengthened its relationships with the Oakland community organizations that work with the University and other Oakland-based institutions through the Oakland Task Force, the University's Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC), and other collaborative planning and revitalization initiatives. In 2008, the Community Relations Committee embarked on a longer-term dialog around issues of property maintenance, municipal services, litter and panhandling that affect the quality of life in Oakland. This collaborative interaction proved so fruitful that the CRC welcomed these community partners as regular participants in CRC meetings. Out of these joint problem-solving discussions emerged the concept of a broader-based Senate Plenary to engage the campus community with city and Oakland community leaders in a collaborative dialog on "improving the quality of life in Oakland."

This plenary was seen as an important forum to bring together faculty, students and administration/staff with Oakland community partners to: 1) gain a better awareness and understanding of existing partnerships and community assets; 2) hear from University, City and Oakland neighborhood leaders about their perceptions of Oakland and its future: concerns, challenges and opportunities ; 3) provide a process for collaboratively examining common issues and advancing collective action; and 4) serve as a catalyst for ongoing visioning, planning and action for university-community partnerships for the future of Oakland. Toward this end, the Community Relations Committee worked with the Office of Community and Government Relations and with representatives of community partner organizations to plan and carry out the October 23, 2008 Senate Plenary, "Improving the Quality of Life in Oakland: Enhancing University-Community Partnership." This report provides an overview of the plenary presentations, a synthesis of the partnership roundtable discussions and recommendations, and a final set of recommendations to focus the community service efforts of the University and the Community Relations Committee in the coming decade.

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

The Senate Plenary began with presentations that included: introductory remarks from Chancellor Mark Nordenberg, comments from Pittsburgh City Councilmen Bruce Kraus and Bill Peduto who represent Oakland, brief overview remarks by Oakland community organizations of their focus and efforts in Oakland, and closing remarks by Provost James Maher. A roundtable discussion and action planning session followed these presentations to frame and promote ongoing university-community partnership work.

Senate President John Baker served to initiate the Plenary by introducing Chancellor Nordenberg. Later, Wesley Rohrer and Ed Galloway, Community Relations Committee co-chairs and coordinators for this Plenary, gave brief remarks and introductions.

Chancellor Nordenberg

Chancellor Mark Nordenberg provided a condensed history of the first 100 years of the University of Pittsburgh in Oakland, which, fittingly, spanned 1908 – when Pitt moved from Downtown to Oakland – to 2008. The Chancellor noted how the University fit into the rich Oakland civic and cultural landscape of the institution that eventually made Oakland the third largest commercial center in Pennsylvania. He underscored the past and recent investments and addition that the University has made in Oakland and how the landscape of the neighborhood has changed over time. He stressed the importance of our longstanding cooperation with City of Pittsburgh leadership, and he offered numerous examples of the University’s collaboration and investment with community partners in shaping Oakland that involved student housing on and off-campus, public and pedestrian safety, “Keep it Clean Oakland” (a project developed from the University COPC), and its ongoing involvement in the Oakland Task Force. The Chancellor also noted the vital role the University now plays, along with UPMC and other Oakland educational institutions, as economic engines for regional development and employment, and he closed his remarks by noting Oakland as the University home where we live and work and share space with the people of Oakland.

Councilman Kraus

As a new member of Pittsburgh’s City Council, Councilman Kraus related how surprised he was at the depth and breadth of Oakland’s community organizations and their efforts from “greening Oakland” to successful business and housing investments, along with litter control, code enforcement and pedestrian safety. He remarked on each of the community partners participating in the plenary session and noted that with these rich neighborhood resources and university commitment and investment that Oakland could achieve a great future in partnership.

Councilman Peduto

Councilman Bill Peduto also stressed the importance of the University and Oakland as the catalyst for continuing regional economic development, but that all this output cannot be housed just in Oakland. He noted Oakland’s connectivity to adjoining communities and the need to enhance transit connections and development partnerships. Councilman Peduto called for *Vision 2020* for Oakland, and that out of this forum should evolve a year-long process to shape that vision and fashion a collaborative plan of action. He invited the assemblage to imagine new transportation links, renewable and cleaner energy production in Panther Hollow, and a sense of place and livability that would benchmark against cities like Cambridge and other successful cities that built on their university-community partnerships.

OAKLAND’S COMMUNITY PARTNERS

A panel of Oakland community organizational leaders provided insights into their purpose and efforts, and they offered their concerns for Oakland at present and ideas for a brighter future.

Community Human Services – Adrienne Walnoha

Community Human Services (CHS) is a multi-service community-based organization located in South Oakland that serves the needs of elderly, youth, developmentally disabled and homeless citizens from across a range of services from health to housing to after-school and supportive outreach. CHS also operates homeless and housing outreach services in other areas of the City and extends its services to

other communities, such as Hazelwood. Ms. Walnoha called attention to the importance of the University's Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) in mobilizing university resources to address community-identified needs and underscored how her organization and the other community partners' organizations have benefited and been strengthened by COPC efforts, which she hoped the University would continue.

Oakland Planning and Development Corporation – David Blenk

Mr. Blenk discussed the origins of Oakland Planning and Development Corporation (OPDC) out of the last major planning process in the 1980s (The Oakland Plan), and he overviewed the organizations focus in three areas: housing development, community organizing, and workforce development. He noted that his organization has worked with the other Oakland community organizations on the panel to develop a new Oakland Neighborhood Partnership, and that this collaboration is now securing significant funding to carry out its collective agenda.

Oakland Community Council –Andrea Boykowycz

Ms. Boykowycz noted that Oakland Community Council (OCC) functions as a forum among residents, public investors and public players to ensure that all voices are heard and considered at the table. She noted the early history of her group as one in opposition to University expansion and plans, and she welcomed the new partnership and visions that have come to represent Oakland in addressing common issues from public and pedestrian safety to code violations, parking and transportation issues. She noted the biggest challenge is also the biggest opportunity in “redefining what we consider the Oakland community.”

Peoples Oakland – Sandy Phillips

Ms. Phillips also reflected on the adversarial roots of Peoples Oakland in challenging the University's master plan for the neighborhood, and she traces the evolution of Peoples Oakland from community advocacy and planning to now an organization advocating and working for the mental health needs of Oakland's population by providing a holistic recovery program that builds community and inclusion for its members in Oakland. In looking to the future of Oakland, Ms. Phillips stressed the importance of remembering the oppositional past so as to sustain and support the collaborative spirit that has since emerged from those difficult days.

Oakland Business Improvement District - Georgia Petropoulos

Ms. Petropoulos noted the more than 150 businesses and 75 property owners and institutions that have dedicated themselves to revitalizing and maintaining the Oakland central business district that is the focus of the Oakland Business Improvement District (OBID). Enhancing the image, cleanliness, and vitality of the Fifth and Forbes business corridors has become a priority of OBID through such initiatives as “Only In Oakland,” the Farmers' Marker, and a “Taste of Oakland,” among others aimed at eliminating graffiti, panhandling and litter in the corridors.

Oakland Transportation and Management Association – Mavis Rainey

As Ms. Rainey presented, the Oakland Transportation and Management Association (OTMA) is dedicated to improving transportation and parking conditions in Oakland through collaborative efforts of institutions and residents and as a forum for community groups, students, visitors, employers and workers to address

issues of transportation. OTMA has worked on transportation and parking planning, as well as alternative transportation and pedestrian safety in and around Oakland.

Oakland Task Force – G. Reynolds Clark

As chair of the Oakland Task Force (OTF), Renny Clark, recognized the evolution of OTF from its roots 30 years ago in the then Caliguiri administration as a forum of exchange among institutions and the city on plans and efforts in Oakland to becoming a partnership of over 25 Oakland institutions, businesses and community groups, public agencies and city government focused on improving Oakland. He noted planning efforts such as the earlier “Oakland Improvement Strategy” to the more recent “The Future of Oakland: A Community Investment Strategy” that helped spur the Schenley Plaza and Boulevard of Allies Bridge replacement, as well as other corridor, business, and institutional improvements. OTF has three charges: 1) continue to stimulate partnership and collaboration; 2) make it easier to get into, out of and around Oakland, and 3) be an advocate of high-quality development. Toward these ends OTF, hopes to enhance Oakland as an international center for education, research and health to help spur the regions economic growth, as well as to celebrate its diversity and make it a vibrant place to live and visit.

Closing Remarks – Provost James Maher

Provost Maher reinforced the importance of *Vision 2020* for Oakland as a unique opportunity for the University and its partners to have an impact on the quality of life in Oakland and for the institution. He noted that such a collaborative planning process for the future development of our broader community builds on the past initiatives and investments of the University in Oakland and adjacent communities in recent years. He underscored the importance of efficient transportation and connectivity between Oakland, Downtown Pittsburgh and outlying communities to optimize the use of Oakland’s assets as an educational, cultural and economic engine. He also emphasized that while we must set realistic goals given the distressing economic conditions and bleak projections for the near future, we cannot afford to lose the momentum that has been generated through our partnerships . Dr. Maher recognized the fragility of Pitt’s fiscal situation in this difficult economic climate; but he pledged that the University would continue to work in partnership to help fulfill the vision of an enhanced Oakland as a diverse, thriving environment for the residents, businesses, visitors and various constituencies of the University. He charged that “We cannot allow our commitment to the neighborhood we live in to be degraded by this (challenging economic crisis).”

Report on Senate Plenary Roundtable Discussions

The following are a synthesis of the five (5) roundtable sessions from the October 23, 2008 Senate Plenary at the University of Pittsburgh. Approximately 55 participants participated in the roundtable process that followed the Plenary panel session. By all accounts these discussions were lively, interactive, and drew diverse and complementary input from university and community partners. Each roundtable had a facilitator and recorder; this synthesis draws from reports submitted by the recorders.

Major concerns and challenges associated with the quality of life in Oakland:

Issue #1: Lack of K-12 Schools

The issue that was discussed most in the October 23, 2008 Senate Plenary was the lack of K-12 schools in Oakland. Three of the five discussions included this in their list of issues facing Oakland. Community members voiced concerns that without an improvement in education, attracting permanent residents to the neighborhood will prove impossible. Currently, the only K-12 education options are private, religious institutions, including St. Agnes, The Oakland School, Oakland Catholic, and Central Catholic. Yearly tuition for these prestigious institutions ranges from \$7,400 (for members of the Catholic Church) to \$9,300. While no discussion disputing the education provided by these schools was part of the roundtable discussions, community members expressed great concern at having no public institutions in their neighborhood.

Issue #2: Public Safety

The next issue that was most discussed was public safety. Two of the five groups spent time discussing this topic with one focusing their discussion almost exclusively on it. The discussants were concerned that crime remained underreported and under-enforced in Oakland, with Central Oakland cited as a place where crime is under-enforced and South Oakland where crime is underreported. In addition, while members of the roundtable applauded the University's "Safe Rider" service, they lamented that its availability was inadequate. However, as some noted, crime data reports show Oakland to be safer than its reputation suggests.

Issue #3: Transportation and Parking

The next issue discussed by plenary roundtable attendees was the issue of transportation and parking. Groups' discussed the seemingly unavailability of parking around Oakland, though some suggested that perhaps more parking was available but commuters were unaware of where to find it. It is the hope of plenary participants that short term and long term solutions would be

considered, perhaps involving trams, more shuttle service, fringe parking, incentives to commuters for using rideshare and carpools. One group discussed the possibility of linking Oakland to the Mon Valley through a light rail system at length.

Issue #4: Housing

Housing was another issue discussed by two of the five roundtable groups at the Plenary, with the quality of the housing stock available being the most frequently discussed item. A desire for a balance of student/nonpermanent housing versus permanent resident housing was expressed. In addition, the groups wanted to see vigorous enforcement of housing code violations sustained as they perceived them to be effective.

Issue #5: Relationship Between Students and Residents

The final issue discussed at length by Plenary attendees was the relationship between students and residents. Residents were vocal about this issue as well as in suggestions for how to begin solving the problem. There are some residents who feel that students are disrespectful to them and to the broader neighborhood and that students do not recognize Oakland as a neighborhood and community – to them, it is just the Pitt campus. Residents suggested that University of Pittsburgh students are unaware of what makes for a good and a bad neighbor and that a concerted educational effort could have great success. Additionally, residents thought that more service and service-learning efforts in the Oakland community would be greatly beneficial in that it would allow students to learn about the Oakland community and dispel the idea that Oakland is just the Pitt campus.

Community Strengths and Assets

The biggest strength discussed was the area's institutions, including the universities, such as the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon, and the UPMC hospital system, which attract visitors, students, and prospective employees from all over the world. The second biggest strength noted was Oakland's commitment towards public transit. One example discussed was the collaboration between the Port Authority of Allegheny County and the University of Pittsburgh that allows students to ride PAT buses for free. Clearly, one reason for this would be the hope that more students would opt for public transportation over the use of personal vehicles. The final strength that was noted included the diversity and cultural aspect that Oakland has to offer. Oakland offers many different ethnic shops and restaurants that highlight cultural diversity. In addition, Oakland is the academic, cultural, and healthcare center of Pittsburgh and is Pennsylvania's third largest "Downtown."

Summary of Recommendations for University-Community Partnership Actions

The recommendations of each discussion group were varied and are presented below, grouped by issue areas.

Issue: Negative Perception of Oakland

- Consider community promotion activities, e.g., I “heart” Oakland campaign.
- Develop a more focused ambiance for the Oakland Business District.
- Identify more funding for neighborhood maintenance for homeowners and façade development (street-scraping) for the business district.
- Make the blocks of Forbes and Fifth Avenues more attractive or inviting, e.g., Meyran to Craft Avenue.
- Encourage community organizations to plan more fun activities (for young adults and families) as a draw to Oakland.
- Develop marketing strategies that focus on assets.
- Engage students in communication departments at Pitt/CMU to market the neighborhood through websites such as YouTube.
- Develop education and awareness programs to the community and to the public of all the amenities that Oakland has to offer and showing the 2020 vision of Oakland.

Issue: Housing

- Insure sustained housing code enforcement.
- Development of affordable housing.
- Develop incentive programs to purchase housing in Oakland if you work in Oakland.
- Diversify housing types.
- Create a housing council to oversee the housing in Oakland and help prevent the absenteeism of landlords not taking responsibility for the condition and the tenants of their property.
- Create an incentive program to help Pitt employees live in Oakland.

Issue: Transportation, Traffic, Parking

- Encourage ride-sharing and van pooling.
- Offer more shuttle service from suburban/urban fringe parking to Oakland.
- Provide more park and ride parking options.
- Develop light rail which services the neighborhood.
- Improve safety for bicycle riders.
- Engage University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) to help in the promotion of Oakland and to promote the use of public transportation among their employees.

Issue: Community Needs

- Sustain ongoing multi-institutional planning, e.g. Oakland Task Force, COPC.
- Promote understanding in the University of human services needs within the Oakland community.
- Conduct a community assets inventory and needs assessment of Oakland or promote use of this information if already available.
- Match University resources with specific identified needs, like under COPC.
- Use University communication outlets to target not just students, but community members as well (Pitt News, WPTS – Pitt's student-run radio station, etc.).

Issue: Student and Community Member Relations

- Provide a class or seminar requirement on taking care of your neighborhood.
- Create ownership for students; show students why volunteering goes beyond required hours and why it is important.
- Partner with the housing office to promote and educate on how to be a good neighbor.
- Create a video clip for students and parents that show longtime residents of Oakland and other stakeholders living, working and recreating in their neighborhood; this might encourage respect among students.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Given the discussion, issues and ideas emerging from the Fall 2009 Plenary, the Community Relations Committee advances the following recommendations to the University community:

- *Maintain its involvement in the Oakland Task Force as the most appropriate community planning forum toward development of a comprehensive Oakland plan and to advance Vision 2020 for Oakland as discussed at the Plenary*
- *Give special attention to Oakland's connectivity to its sub-neighborhoods, adjoining communities and Downtown Pittsburgh as well as to transportation in, through, and around Oakland and issues such as parking, alternative transit (e.g. rail, biking, walking), and pedestrian and traffic safety and control.*
- *Continue University commitment to the Community Outreach Partnership Center or toward some ongoing center for community engagement and service learning to continue to mobilize and coordinate university resources in working with community partners on community-identified needs.*
- *Establish some level of an Employee Assisted Housing Program with the University's Housing Resource Center to work with community partners in marketing Oakland housing and housing development to University community as a place to live and work.*
- *Continue working with City of Pittsburgh and Oakland community partners on housing code enforcement and improving quality of housing in Oakland.*
- *Enhance efforts through Student Affairs and the University's Housing Resource Center to prepare students for living off-campus as responsible residents of the neighborhood and support their access to safe and reasonable housing, as well as provide housing legal assistance where needed, as well as engage students in volunteer service in Oakland.*
- *Use the Community Relations Committee as an ongoing sounding board for the university community in engagement with Oakland and other community partners to continue to address the issue from this Plenary, including: raising awareness of and marketing Oakland, public safety, schools, trash/litter/recycling (cleanliness), panhandling, etc.*