ALLEGHENY COUNTY
RIVERFRONT
POLICY
PLAN
Allegheny County Riverfront Policy Plan

Prepared for
The Allegheny County Board of Commissioners
Tom Foerster, Chairman
Pete Flaherty, Commissioner
Larry Dunn, Commissioner

and the
Citizens and Municipalities of Allegheny County

prepared by
Allegheny County Planning Department
Raymond L. Reaves, Director

with
Environmental, Planning & Design
100 Ross Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

April 1993
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New river recreation near the 40th St. Bridge, Allegheny River.
INTRODUCTION

The Allegheny County Riverfront Policy Plan provides for the comprehensive management of the County's riverfronts. The goals of the Plan are to, (1) protect natural resources, (2) promote development, coordinate public facilities, (3) and provide for river access. Rather than regulations, it is a framework within which municipalities and developers can administer and implement their individual plans. The framework does not attempt to impose specific use and design control. Instead, it provides planning guidance based on shared goals for Allegheny County's riverfronts. One fundamental activity of Allegheny County government is the management of regional resources through coordination of its permitting and funding processes.

The Policies Plan will have practical benefits. Municipalities will have the assurance that the environment is protected, and that regional public facilities operate at a consistently acceptable level. River access is provided from a regional perspective. For example, the County Storm Water Management Plans regulate a regional system and protect municipalities from flooding caused by excessive upstream drainage; the Policy Plan incorporates and expands on this to include other regional resources.

The Policy Plan will aid private riverfront developers by providing a single point of access into a coordinated, permitting and approval process. The County has also identified development opportunity areas, which are underutilized riverfront parcels well-suited for development. By understanding the site, scope, time frame, and requirements of the review process in the project planning stage, decision-makers can locate, design, schedule and fund projects more efficiently.

Dedicated to good planning, successful riverfront development and efficient implementation, the County Riverfront Policy Plan is comprised of three components:

- **County Riverfront Policy**, the guiding principles of the Plan
- **The Riverfront Development and Access Plan**, the graphic representation of the Plan
- **Implementation Action Plan**, the steps necessary to execute the Plan

Following the descriptions of the Plan components, some background information is given concerning various issues identified in the Plan. Additional information and background studies are maintained by the Allegheny County Planning Department and available for research and reference.
Aerial riverscape of Ohio River above Brunot's Island.
COUNTY RIVERFRONT POLICY

The County Riverfront Policy is a guide which provides a framework for decision-making and implementation over time and can be applied to new situations as they arise. The following guidelines provide a comprehensive County Riverfront Policy.

Protect natural resources by:

- Establishing a system of development classification to protect lands such as hillsides, wetlands, and shorelines and to maintain a "green necklace" along the rivers.

- Promoting good water management practices to protect water quality, manage storm water, and maintain the hydrologic cycle.

- Ensuring erosion and sedimentation control to promote soil conservation and to minimize pollution.

Promote development by:

- Identifying development opportunity areas to alert municipalities and developers of favorable sites.

- Coordinating existing approval and permitting processes to increase public sector efficiency and to expedite private sector development.

- Optimizing discretionary County funding to help implement riverfront policies.

Coordinate public facilities by:

- Encouraging riverfront development where water and sewer facilities are adequate to ensure balanced growth.

- Permitting development in areas where County roads and bridges within the riverfront zone have capacity to maintain an acceptable level of service.

Provide river access by:

- Providing a riverfront setback for future flexibility in public access.

- Defining a riverfront trail to provide continuous, non-motorized movement County-wide and beyond.

- Identifying regional access sites to provide for river-oriented recreational opportunities.
The Riverfront Development and Access Plan documents the physical components of the County Riverfront Policy Plan. The Existing Water Inventory, the Existing Public Facilities Inventory, and the Existing Land Use Inventory contain various facts in map form about the County riverfronts. A data base and other information sources are maintained at the Allegheny County Planning Department. The Riverfront Zone identified on these plans includes the river valley and adjacent hill-sides and is defined by the nearest contiguous parallel road or the effective top of slope, whichever is greater.

THE PHYSICAL COMPONENTS

The Riverfront Development and Access Plan summarizes the major physical components of the Allegheny County Policy Plan: a Conservation and Development classification system; identification of prime development parcels, as Opportunity Areas; and a long term plan for River Access.

- **Conservation and Development**

  The Conservation/Development classification defines land and water sensitivity and provides general development guidelines. The criteria on which a designation of Land Conservation is based includes environmental sensitivity and river access on a County-wide scale. Vegetated hillsides of the river valleys which are generally steep and sometimes prone to landslides and a riverfront "green edge" are categorized as Conservation. This green edge is at least a riverfront setback protecting the natural shoreline, but may also include wetlands; shallow, vegetated areas lower than the 100 year flood elevation; water intake protection zones; or a riverfront trail. The surface area of all the rivers are considered Water Conservation areas.

  The Conservation/Development classifications depict broad concepts and must be refined at the municipal or site plan level. For example, the green necklace concept of a natural shoreline is the preferred typical water edge solution, but may be continued along rights-of-way or easements away from the river for short sections to accommodate existing commercial and industrial uses. The following chart summarizes selected criteria which determines each classification, its protection and allowable uses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Protection</th>
<th>Allowable Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land Conservation</td>
<td>• environmentally sensitive areas:</td>
<td>• basic character to remain unchanged</td>
<td>• low intensity or use causing minimal disturbance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- steep hillsides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- landslide prone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- shallow lands below the 100 year flood elev.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- wetlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- natural shoreline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- water intakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- river access sites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- riverfront trail corridors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Development</td>
<td>• all land not in Conservation</td>
<td>• as per existing regulations</td>
<td>• full range of development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Conservation</td>
<td>• all rivers</td>
<td>• as per existing regulations</td>
<td>• appropriate development and land site support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEGEND

RIVERFRONT ZONE
CONSERVATION / DEVELOPMENT

CONSERVATION
DEVELOPMENT

OPPORTUNITY AREAS
< 50 ACRES
50 - 100 ACRES
>100 ACRES

RIVER ACCESS
EXISTING
PROPOSED

RIVERFRONT TRAIL
REGIONAL ACCESS POINT
POINT STATE PARK

ACCESS
THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY
RIVERFRONT POLICIES PLAN
PREPARED FOR: ALLEGHENY COUNTY
PREPARED BY: ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING & DESIGN
100 ROSS STREET
PITTSBURGH, PA 15219

NOT TO SCALE

RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS PLAN
Riverfront trail along the Monongahela River.
• **Opportunity Areas**

Opportunity areas are parcels of land currently underutilized and ripe for redevelopment. The Opportunity Areas include former industrial sites, rail yards, and vacant lands totaling about 2,700 acres. They range in size from 5 to well over 200 acres. Opportunity areas are in the Land Development classification and represent about 20% of the land in that category.

The Opportunity Areas are a substantial inventory of developable riverfront land of great potential. To stimulate riverfront redevelopment, local municipalities should devise strategies to actively market their Opportunity Areas. Such strategies, pursued in conjunction with County efforts to help facilitate the development process through its Riverfront Policy Plan, will result in a public/private partnership catalyst for Riverfront Zone development.

• **River Access**

The Riverfront Policy and Access Plan depicts a regional riverfront access system. This system is composed of a linear Riverfront Trail and Regional Access Points. The proposed Riverfront Trail is a long range plan for a continuous corridor along our riverfronts. Serving not only the County, but larger populations as well, the Riverfront Trail will join with the Montour Trail, connecting Allegheny with Washington County, and the Youghiogheny Trail, linking Confluance with Connellsiville and ultimately Washington D.C. These trails are part of a national movement to convert abandoned railroad rights-of-way into corridors for non-motorized movement. The proposed Riverfront Trail is located in either a transitional railroad right-of-way, the “green necklace” riverfront setback or a parallel road right-of-way.

The Regional Access Points provide County residents, especially those from non-riverfront municipalities, water access as well as other recreational opportunities. The characteristics of Regional Access Points are their multi-municipal service areas reached by major collector roads, sites sized to accommodate significant facilities, and potential to combine with and expand existing facilities.

**River Access Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Linear Riverfront Trail</th>
<th>Regional Access Points</th>
<th>Local Access Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>• Allegheny County and beyond</td>
<td>• along river green edge, abandoned transitional rail corridor, or parallel road</td>
<td>• collector road or pedestrian access</td>
<td>• average 100,000 population zones</td>
<td>• municipality or neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• continuous corridor</td>
<td>• 5-10 acre, flat site</td>
<td>• existing facilities</td>
<td>• collector road or pedestrian access</td>
<td>• local road or where local interest and resources warrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• existing facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 5-10 acre, flat site</td>
<td>• small site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• existing facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recreational Opportunities**

| • walking | • boat launching | • picnicking |
| • hiking | • boat docks | • fishing |
| • biking | • car/trailer parking | • children's play |
| | • shelter/rest room | • nature study |
| | • spectator area | • seating |
| | • ball fields | |
New office/residential development along the Allegheny River.
**IMPLEMENTATION ACTION PLAN**

- **Institute the Coordinated Approval Process.**
  
The County is heavily involved in issuing permits for development. There are many departments responsible for various approvals, but they are uncoordinated. The Existing Approval Process chart on page twelve illustrates the existing process: many possible starting points (bold arrows), few dependent relationships among permits (light arrows), and many possible exiting points (outlined arrows).

  The Coordinated Approval Process, illustrated on page twelve, improves the existing process by adding an initial and final communication point with a County coordinating agency. This will serve to clarify the existing requirements and streamline permit/plan approval procedures for developers and municipalities.

- **Distribute discretionary County capital funds to municipalities with an approved riverfront plan consistent with the standards set down in the County Riverfront Policies Plan or to private development receiving County site plan approval.**

  County funds, which can be awarded with some discretion, will be distributed to municipal projects in riverfront communities once the proposed municipal riverfront plans are consistent with the standards set down in the County Riverfront Policy Plan, land use controls and other applicable criteria are met. Further, private development projects which are consistent with the Policy Plan, other performance criteria, and the municipality's riverfront plan will be eligible for County discretionary funding. The County will work with developers to help with the successful completion of the coordinated approval process.

  Municipal riverfront plans will provide for local coordination with County Riverfront Policy concerning natural resources, development, public facilities, and river access. Through inclusion of a riverfront zoning ordinance in their plans, municipalities can make decisions and guide development based on community needs. The specific content of a riverfront zoning ordinance will be determined by individual municipalities. As a service, a model riverfront ordinance will be supplied by the County.

- **Encourage adoption of the County's model riverfront ordinance by municipalities.**

  The County is in the process of preparing a model riverfront zoning ordinance which addresses development guidelines on the riverfront. This model ordinance, would be a kit of parts from which municipalities can prepare customized riverfront zoning ordinances. The ordinance will be a major implementation tool for the community riverfront plans and will supplement the riverfront municipalities' zoning designations or district requirements already in place.

- **Improve public access to the rivers on a phased basis, as funding and demand warrants, until a County-wide distribution is achieved.**

  The Riverfront Development and Access Plan proposes a County-wide riverfront trail and additional regional river access points. The riverfront trail is located on at least one shore of each river based on availability. The regional access points are based on the pattern of existing access, the location of sites, population, community acceptance, and possible ties to existing parks and open space systems.

  Various funding and implementation options exist for the improvements to river access including: zoning setbacks for the green necklace along the rivers, user charges for use of public facilities, private contributions, and volunteer work by concerned citizens.
- **Define and maintain a public facility capacity monitoring system.**

  The purpose of a capacity monitoring system is to determine the capacity of County-provided public facilities available to accommodate additional development. Once established, this monitoring system will become part of the County Riverfront Policy Plan. Should a project be determined to overload a public facility, development may begin once improvements to the facility are made.

  The public facility capacity monitoring system will include sewer and water systems and County-owned roads and bridges. These facilities will be evaluated for the optimum design capacity, the current level of use, and the capacity to establish a base of information. Based on this information, development projects' impacts will be evaluated. To remain viable, the monitoring system's data concerning the current level of use and excess capacity of facilities must be updated over time. Municipalities or individual developers will provide current applicable data as part of their permitting or funding process.

- **Establish a regional recreation entity to provide capital improvements, operation, and maintenance of the public park system.**

  The general concept of establishing a regional entity such as a land trust with the ability to finance, operate and contract park development, and maintenance has been considered by Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh. The scope of this entity could include all County and City parks and open space systems. Funds collected by the entity for park use could be supplemented by other revenue sources such as user fees, facility rental, and concessions.

- **Complete preparation of the County stormwater management plans. Enforce the State requirement that municipalities adopt a storm water management plan with regulations at least as strict as the County’s model ordinance.**

  The County is in the process of working with the municipalities to develop and implement storm water management plans as time and funding permits. Some of the analysis undertaken by municipalities during preparation of their riverfront plans will help to expedite development of the storm water management plans.
COUNTY PROCESSES AND REGIONAL ISSUES

• Approvals and Permits

Currently, Allegheny County is involved in many plan approvals and permitting processes. As depicted in the following chart, the County has some degree of involvement in nearly every aspect of riverfront development.

Most permits and approvals are reviewed by various County departments and can be obtained independently without receiving other permits which may be needed. At the State and Federal level, however, the permits are better coordinated. For example, PA DER and the Army Corps jointly coordinate on a permit relating to waterways. Further, prior to the issuance of the permit, other State and Federal agencies are involved as needed. The PA DER acts as a clearing house, assuring that both the applicant and the government agencies are fully informed and involved.

With slight modifications to the existing process, the County can coordinate its approval process similar to the State and Federal system and thereby gain a powerful tool in the management of development. The proposed Coordinated Approval Process, is a faster and more efficient system. It provides for a single initial and final communication point with a County "coordinating agency" in the process. Thus, any person seeking a permit or plan approval from the County would first make contact with this County coordinating agency. At a pre-application meeting, the submittal will be checked for conformance with the County Riverfront Policies Plan, and the applicant will receive a list of other required County permits and approvals. Other County departments issuing permits or approvals would be directed to require proof of the pre-application meeting prior to initiation of any review process.

Legend

= Direct County Involvement
= Indirect, Partial or Possible County Involvement
= No County Involvement
• **Capital Budget**

The Allegheny County budget provides funds to municipalities for capital improvements. While the absolute amount and distribution of discretionary funds varies from year to year, the following chart lists average annual discretionary allocations to be expected.

Many water and sewer facilities and County roads and bridges are located in the Riverfront Zone. Discretionary funding of these public facilities comprise over half of the typical discretionary allocations. Therefore, a significant amount of the total available discretionary funds can be expected to be allocated to riverfront communities. As noted previously, communities with approved riverfront plans will be eligible to receive these funds.

• **Surface Water Management**

The County is actively involved with the management of surface waters through its Storm Water Management and Floodplain management activities. Act 167 the Storm Water Management Act gives the County the responsibility for determining performance standards for runoff from new development. The county has as part of its storm water implementation activities developed a review procedure in support of municipal enforcement activities of these standards.

While floodplain management is primarily implemented through local ordinances, the County provides floodplain mapping support to municipalities and lending institutions. Additionally, the County is assisting municipalities in implementing the FEMA Community rating system which will result in reduced flood insurance rates for citizens of participating municipalities. County flood control activities are intergrated with the above management activities and coordinated with the Corps of Engineers and PADER.

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**Legend**
- **Public Boat Ramps**
- **Marinas**
- **Watershed Boundary**
- **Outfall**
- **Drinking Water Intake - Surface**
- **Drinking Water Intake - Well**
- **Locks and Dams**

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**Existing Water Inventory**

**The Allegheny County Riverfront Policies Plan**

Prepared for: Allegheny County
Prepared by: Environmental Planning & Design
100 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Not to Scale
- **Erosion and Sedimentation**

The State has guidelines for erosion and sedimentation control and has delegated responsibility for plan review to the County. Prior to any State or Federal permitting for structures in the floodway, erosion and sedimentation plans must be approved by the County. The County's Riverfront Policy Plan will require strict enforcement of the State's technical rules and make recommendations concerning landslide prone areas, maintenance of existing vegetation, as well as maximum slopes.

- **Water and Sewer Facilities**

Allegheny County is involved in water and sewerage issues since the County Health Department controls all plumbing permits and the County capital budget provides significant funding amounts for treatment plant and conveyance system maintenance and improvements. Funding for such improvements will be determined based on the public facility capacity monitoring system and the preparation and approval of municipal riverfront plans.

The ownership, maintenance, and service areas of water and sewer facilities in the County is complex. The systems may be divided into treatment plants and conveyance systems. The treatment plants are owned by authorities and may serve one or more municipalities. Sewage plant service areas are closely related to watershed areas. The service areas, treatment plants and well locations for the water treatment plants again, may follow municipal boundaries, but more likely do not. The conveyance systems, pipes which move the water and sewerage, are typically owned by the municipality in which they are located.

- **County Roads and Bridges**

County-owned roads and bridges comprise a significant part of the overall transportation system of the region, and their construction and maintenance account for over 40% of the typical discretionary funds of the County capital budget. The current piecemeal approach to allocating these funds for road and bridge improvements in the Riverfront Zone will be replaced with the public facility excess capacity monitoring system.

- **River Access**

Vehicular and pedestrian river access in Allegheny County exists in many forms, both privately and publicly owned. Private recreational access includes marinas, river-oriented commercial uses, and transportation terminals. Private industrial access includes all river transportation dependent industries and terminals. Because of the independent and transient nature of private access, only public recreational access will be addressed.

Public recreational river access is addressed at a County level, because our rivers are unique natural resources which serve a regional population. About 15 public recreation access points exist in the form of parks and boat ramps. A County-wide system of these existing access points a proposed riverfront trail, and additional regional access points is shown on the Riverfront Development and Access Plan.

- **Interdependent Regional Systems**

Interdependent regional systems are linear in nature and often tied to physical land characteristics which transcend municipal boundaries. Allegheny County is actively involved in the coordinated development of several regional systems. For example, the Greenway program is a strategic plan for consolidation of unused, often undevelopable, open spaces into a green network and the Intermodal Freight Transportation Study is a plan for a public/private partnership in the promotion of the region as a freight transportation center.

Visual access to the rivers occur from roads, bridges and hillslopes throughout the County, typically within the Riverfront Zone. Since visual access is so prevalent, it is best considered on an individual case basis. Performance standards and guidelines for visual access will be included in the County's model riverfront zoning ordinance.
LAND USE

- **Existing Land Use**

The 13 maps at the end of this report show a generalized pattern of existing land uses within the identified riverfront zone. They are arranged end to end as shown on the map index. This allows the reader to view a 12-15 mile stretch of riverfront and several municipalities simultaneously. In this way, municipalities and land owners can gain a broader perspective of how their own riverfront land is inter-related with other lands along the river.

The general categories of commercial, industrial, residential and conservation uses are shown in standard colors and indicate several dominant characteristics. Historically the rivers and their valleys were the focus of development, providing easy routes for water, rail and road transportation. Level river terraces provided land for heavy industry and commerce while adjacent moderate slopes were used for housing. The very steep wooded hillsides, occurring on the outside of the river bends, escaped development because of the difficulty and cost. Until recently, heavy industry and the railroads have been an effective barrier to public access and use of the rivers for recreation or scenic enjoyment.

With the rapid changes in the regional economy and the "downsizing" of heavy industry and railroads, land use along the rivers is changing and many new areas of opportunity are available. These are outlined on the inventory maps. The character and water quality of the rivers have also significantly improved. Several riverfront communities notably Oakmont, in Allegheny County have historically taken positive advantage of their riverfront access. Many more riverfront towns will soon have the potential for community revitalization with river access as an attractive component.

- **Proposed Land Use Controls**

Allegheny County has prepared a model Riverfront Overlay District zoning which is intended to encourage coordinated and uniform treatment of certain kinds of river-related resources, without interfering with each municipality's underlying basic zoning. The overlay district in each municipality would correspond to the riverfront zone delineated on the following maps. Within it, environmentally sensitive lands such as steep wooded hillsides, flood plains, and wetlands, as well as rail corridors, public parks, and a continuous riverfront setback adjoining the water's edge are proposed as conservation zones. Permitted uses in conservation zones would be restricted to low intensity uses, and public recreation uses involving visual or physical access to the water's edge would be encouraged.

Areas not classified for conservation could continue to be used and developed for the full range of uses allowed by each municipality's zoning regulations, except that permitted uses on land which actually include river frontage or abuts the riverfront setback area would be restricted to uses which are generally open to the public such as restaurants, entertainment, and retail uses.

The overall intent of the proposed riverfront overlay district is to protect environmentally sensitive lands, preserve a continuous open strip at the river's edge with the potential for public access, and to encourage the reuse of riverfront land for compatible community development.

The Ohio, Allegheny, Monongahela and Youghiogheny Rivers are important to the economic and community revitalization of our Region. The Allegheny County Riverfront Policy Plan is the first step in a comprehensive strategy to optimize the potential of this vital resource. The Plan looks to the future and is respectful of our heritage. All of the necessary ingredients are present to assure that implementation of the Riverfront Policy Plan will have positive economic, social, and environmental impacts. Through the combined efforts of governments and private partners at every level, the potential of our Region's rivers will become a reality.

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EXISTING LAND USE 1991
ALLEGHENY COUNTY RIVERFRONT POLICY PLAN
PREPARED BY: ALLEGHENY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT and ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING & DESIGN
EXISTING LAND USE 1991
ALLEGHENY COUNTY RIVERFRONT POLICY PLAN
PREPARED BY: ALLEGHENY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
and ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING & DESIGN
SCALE IN MILES

Legend:
- RIVER ZONE
- COMMERCIAL
- INDUSTRIAL
- RESIDENTIAL
- CONSERVATION
- AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY
EXISTING LAND USE 1991
ALLEGHENY COUNTY
RIVERFRONT POLICY PLAN
PREPARED BY: ALLEGHENY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
and ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING & DESIGN

SCALE IN MILES

Legend:
- RIVER ZONE
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- RIVERZONE
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