

# **SAW MILL RUN GREEN BOULEVARD MASTER PLAN**

Presentation to SPC

March 2024



**WATERSHEDS**  
OF SOUTH PITTSBURGH

A decorative graphic on the right side of the slide. It features a large teal triangle pointing downwards from the top right, and a large green triangle pointing upwards from the bottom right. These two triangles meet at a central point. A solid blue circle is positioned on the left side of the green triangle, overlapping its boundary.

# OUTLINE

Background

Overview of Process

Design Focus Areas

Key Findings

Recommendations

Next Steps

# Watersheds of South Pittsburgh

Began in Fall of 2014 as the Saw Mill Run Watershed Association, a program of Economic Development South

Purpose to address the problems of poor water quality in the stream and the frequent localized flooding leading to over 100 years of disinvestment in the Saw Mill Run Boulevard Corridor as well as to create a stand alone watershed organization

Initial work focused on working with the 12 municipalities in the watershed to develop an Integrated Watershed Management Plan

2019 the Saw Mill Run Watershed Association separated from Economic Development South and rebranded as Watersheds of South Pittsburgh

2020 Watersheds of South Pittsburgh was awarded a grant from DCNR to create a Master Site Development Plan for the Saw Mill Run Corridor in the City of Pittsburgh

# Saw Mill Run

Over the years many plans have been developed to improve the Rt. 51 corridor. The earliest known plan, by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., had this to say about Saw Mill Run Valley:

*The Saw Mill Run valley, from Temperanceville to Fairhaven and possibly beyond, offers a park and parkway opportunity which should not be neglected until commercial development becomes a serious stumbling block to its realization. It is an interesting valley of varying width and form, enclosed by high, steep banks, occasionally wooded; in some parts it is wide enough only for a drive, while in others large, flat meadows make ideal places for play. And Saw Mill Run itself, when it is no longer used as an open sewer, will be an additional element of park value.*

-Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., 1910  
Pittsburgh Main Thoroughfares and the Down Town District

# Saw Mill Run

Saw Mill Run is now a poster child of urban stream syndrome.

*The Saw Mill Run corridor has been the subject of 30 studies in the last 23 years.*

This Master Site Development Plan provides a vision for improving the safety, resilience, and appearance of the Saw Mill Run stream corridor over the next generation.

The Plan aims to complement other studies already completed in this area and may generate additional studies as needed.

Urban stream syndrome describes the impacts of impervious surfaces and intense land development on streams. It is usually characterized by increased nutrients and contaminants in the water, sudden or “flashy” changes in water level, modified channel shape or structure, and reduced biodiversity (Meyer et al. 2005).

# CORRIDOR CONDITION

- 24 flood events in the past 11 years
- More than 28 used car lots dominate the corridor with vacant and distressed buildings
- Lacking a diverse mix of businesses
- Unsafe for pedestrians
- The riparian buffer is insufficient or nonexistent
- Floodplain encroachment/ pavement up to the edge of the stream
- Planning and development regulations do not accommodate stream do not address the need for an adequate floodplain,
- Allowable development patterns worsen stormwater runoff, degrading water quality, increasing erosion and landslides
- The lack of consideration for Saw Mill Run has worsened the impacts from flooding.
- Lack of coordinated efforts inhibit transformational change, perpetuating the problem even as climate change threatens to increase Pittsburgh's annual rainfall.





# PLANNING PROCESS



**ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE**



**PUBLIC  
ENGAGEMENT**



**STAKEHOLDER  
INTERVIEWS**



**TECHNICAL  
ANALYSIS**



# ADVISORY COMMITTEE



PITTSBURGH WATER &  
SEWER AUTHORITY



PENNDOT



DEPARTMENT OF CITY  
PLANNING



RIVERLIFE



Allegheny  
County

ALLEGHENY COUNTY



Pittsburgh Regional Transit

PITTSBURGH REGIONAL  
TRANSIT



WATERSHEDS  
OF SOUTH PITTSBURGH

WATERSHEDS OF SOUTH  
PITTSBURGH



PA STATE REP JESSICA  
BENHAM'S OFFICE

# GOALS OF PLAN

Balance the need for access to individual private properties while improving multimodal traffic safety through the simplification of points of ingress/egress.

Improve the safety and convenience of mobility alternatives within the Corridor for individuals who do not have access to a personal vehicle.

Expand pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connectivity in the short term through the removal of accessibility barriers.

Identify locations to strategize long-term pedestrian and bicycle access improvements.

Refine and enforce regulations against illegal encroachments of adjacent uses within the existing sidewalks and right-of-way.

Mitigate the impacts of flooding by addressing floodwater storage and water velocity during high water events.

Elevate the public's perception of the Corridor and define a distinct identity.

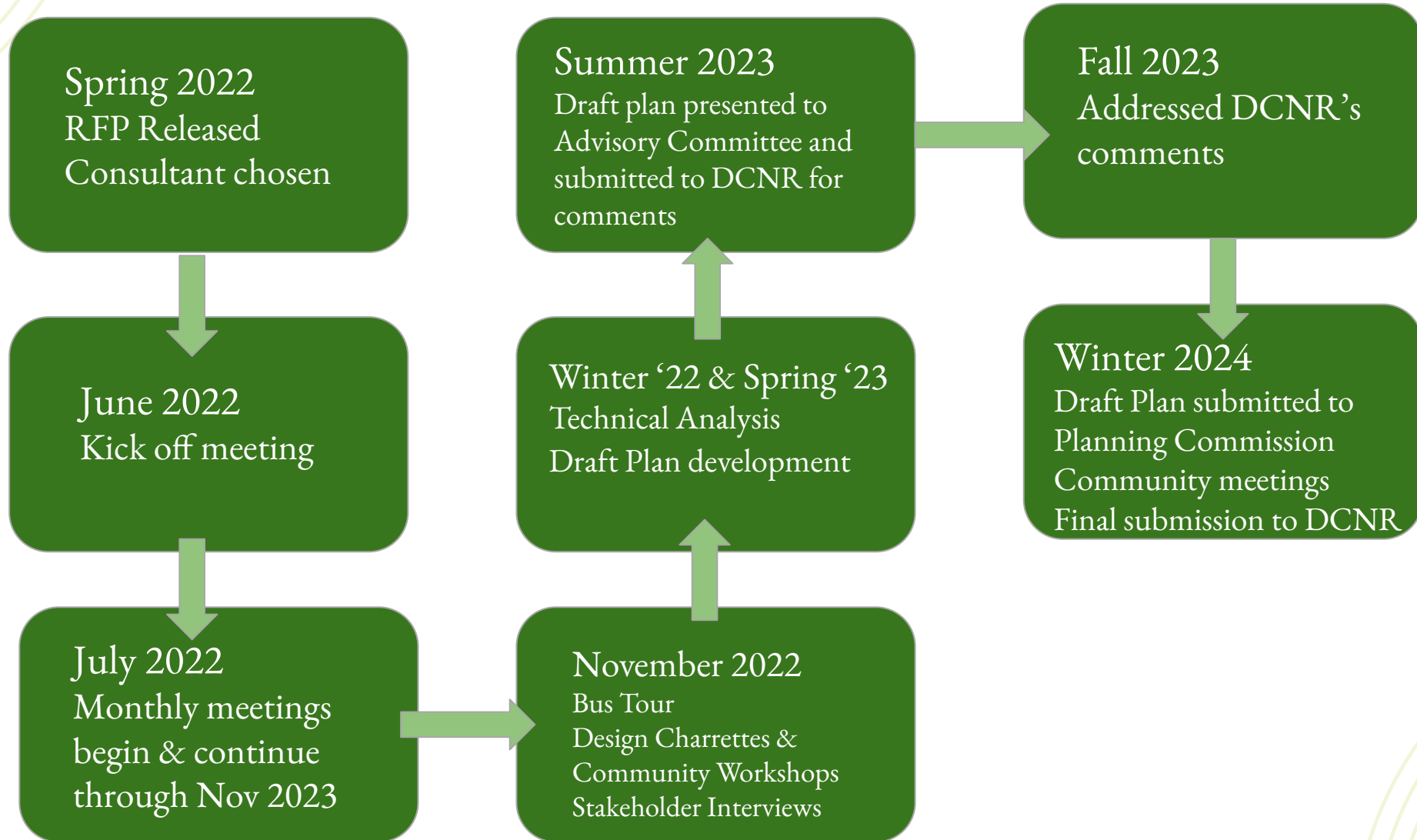
Amend land use and development permissions and regulations to more effectively reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff.

Adopt an incident reporting, tracking, and follow-up process for addressing resident and property owner issues.

Create and adopt a management framework with which to coordinate agencies and stakeholders relating to major public improvements within the Corridor, including transit and transportation, sewer, public safety, flood mitigation, and stormwater.

Transform underutilized areas throughout the Corridor into accessible public spaces.

# TIMELINE



# TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

- Zoning & Land Use
- Demographics
- Transportation
- Natural Resources
- Parks, Open Space, Recreational Assets
- Historic and Cultural Assets
- Park & Green Space Access
- Crash Prone Areas
- Flooding
- Pollutants & Acid Mine Drainage
- Ecology

Flooding map Red > than 5 feet



# Site Selection Criteria



**Typology 1**  
**Lowland Neighborhood**



**Typology 2**  
**Natural in character and occur on publicly-held land**



**Typology 3**  
**Highly constricted stream on private land**



**Typology 4**  
**Vertical streambanks or walls/private land**



**Typology 5**  
**Held by a public entity extreme topography & channelization**



**Typology 6**  
**Narrow, steep, publicly inaccessible parcels**

As part of the analysis of the Study Corridor, the parcels immediately adjacent to Saw Mill Run were evaluated to identify common conditions, such as topography, ownership, and stream constrictions.

The analysis resulted in the creation of six categories, or “typologies” that can generally be used to describe site conditions in the Corridor

# DESIGN FOCUS AREAS



WEST END



SELDOM SEEN GREENWAY



"BATHTUB" SOUTH OF WOODRUFF



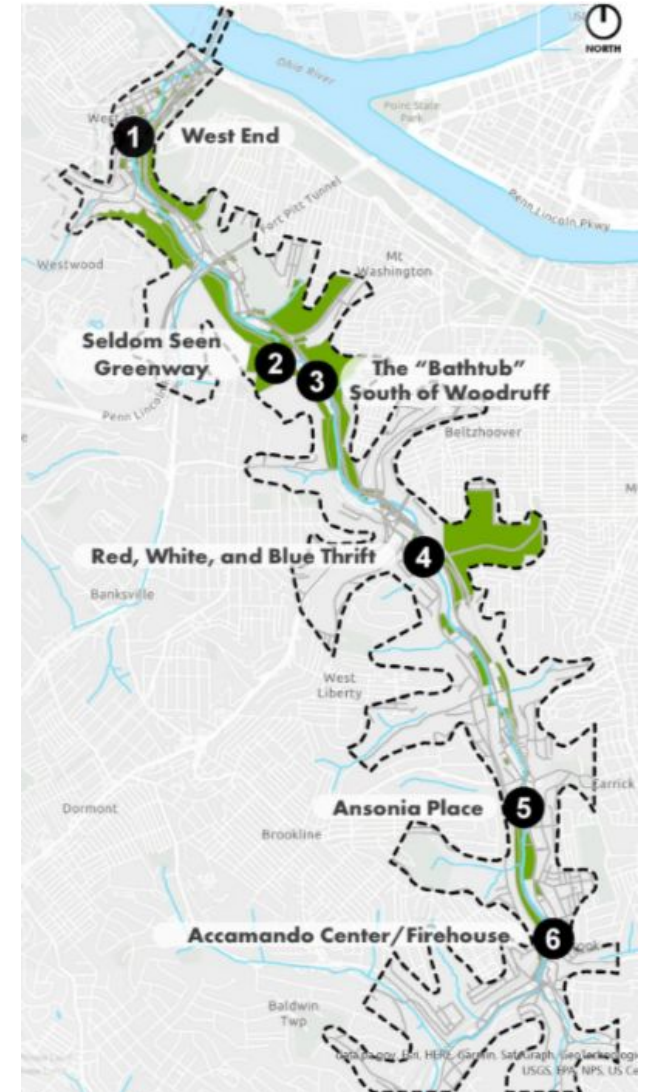
RED, WHITE, AND BLUE THRIFT



ANSONIA PLACE



ACCAMONDO CENTER



# Wabash Park

Wabash Park adjoins the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh West End Branch and contains a flat field used for spontaneous play, two basketball courts, a children's play area, and an off-street parking area.

Saw Mill Run flows along the back of the park and its channel is lined with concrete mattresses. Rocky alluvial deposits accumulate in this section of the stream.

The streambank along and upstream from the park is lined with concrete mattresses, which reduce erosion of the streambank but can increase water velocity and cause negative visual impacts for park visitors compared to other erosion control measures or a natural green streambank.

*Most of this Design Focus Area falls within the 100-year floodplain.*



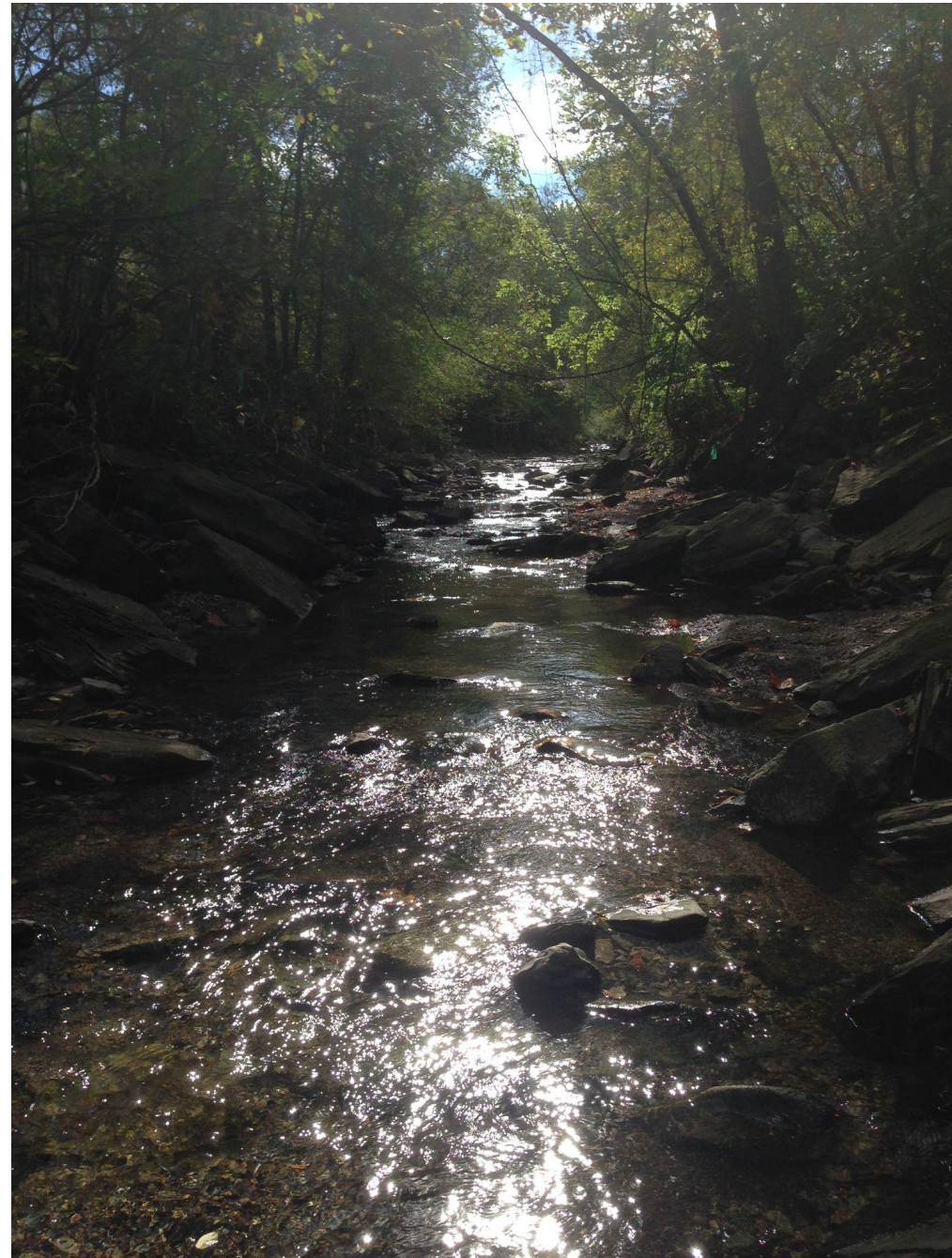
# Seldom Seen Greenway

An existing green space within the Corridor, recently been redesignated as a park.

The trailhead for the greenway occupies the corner of a lot owned by Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works for the storage of road salt.

The site includes walking trails and a dramatic brick arch that supports a now-inactive railroad line. . Once visitors pass beneath the arch, the sounds of Route 51 fade away and the greenway feels immersive, creating an experience unlike anything else in the Corridor.

*The trails and the parking lot at Seldom Seen Greenway are within the 100-year floodplain, but the steep slopes on the site keep the floodplain contained close to the stream.*





# The Bathtub

The “Bathtub” is a narrow stretch of the Saw Mill Run stream channel between Route 51 and a series of warehouses and stores.

The stream has been straightened through this section, creating high velocity flows that cause erosion problems downstream, including in Seldom Seen Greenway.

Approximately 1,700 of the 2,000 feet of stream channel in this section falls on property that is owned by the City and is considered part of Mt. Washington Park.

*This Design Focus Area is located entirely within the 100-year floodplain, which extends across Route 51 in this area.*



# Red White and Blue

A busy thrift store located at the intersection of Bausman Street and Route 51. Saw Mill Run flows behind all of these facilities.

The back walls of these buildings extend to the stream, creating vertical streambanks that exacerbate velocity issues.

An inactive right-of-way crosses the thrift store parking lot. A bridge, which is now decommissioned, used to provide access to vacant properties now held by the City of Pittsburgh.

The Pittsburgh Regional Transit South Busway passes behind the vacant properties, and the T-Line runs on the opposite hillside.



*The entire Design Focus Area, from the new self-storage facility at the northern end, to the warehouses at the southern end, falls within the 100-year floodplain.*

# Ansonia Place

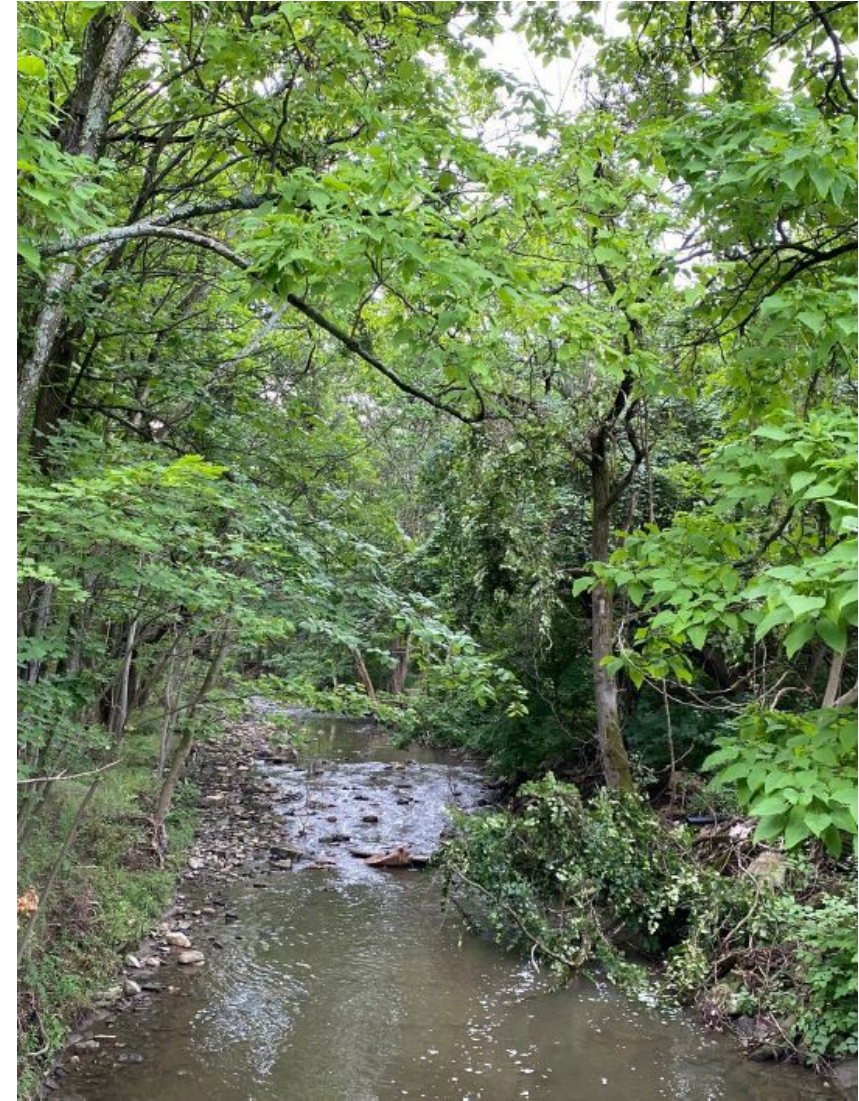
Ansonia Place is a collection of parcels that was purchased by the City of Pittsburgh through a FEMA buyout program. The homes that once stood on this site have been demolished.

Wetland vegetation, such as cattails, is beginning to grow in a low area at the northern end of the site. Most of Ansonia Place is wooded and has relatively low levels of invasive species compared to other parts of the Corridor.

Saw Mill Run is contaminated with Abandoned Mine Drainage (AMD) from an upstream discharge point.

The South Bank T-Station is located at the southern end of the site, across from the intersection of Route 51 and Midwood Avenue.

***The 100-year floodplain covers the whole Design Focus Area and portions of Route 51.***



# Accamondo Center

Accamondo Center is a community center housed in a historic fire station near the intersection of Route 51 and Maytide Street.

This Design Focus Area includes the stream channel between Route 51 and the South Busway, as well as Route 51 and a series of parcels held by a utility company at the intersection of Route 51 and Route 88.

This intersection experiences frequent flooding and severe traffic backups.

In addition to flooding, Saw Mill Run faces other challenges in this area. Its banks are lined with invasive species, tightly constricted by steep banks and a vertical wall for the South Busway corridor, and is contaminated by AMD.

*Most of the Design Focus Area is located in the 100-year floodplain.*





# KEY FINDINGS

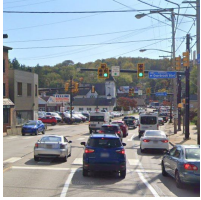
Current planning and development regulations do not address the need for an adequate floodplain, worsening stormwater runoff, increasing the incidents of flooding, degrading water quality and causing erosion. As a whole, the system is under stress from development, flooding and other environmental constraints, and a nebulous management system.

The Corridor-wide recommendations emphasize policy and coordination, and guide changes to policy, management, and considerations for implementation of improvements at the corridor scale.

Design Focus Area recommendations call for physical improvements to the six sites studied along the Corridor and present solutions that can be applied to comparable sites throughout the Corridor.

Together, the Design Focus Area recommendations and the Corridor-wide recommendations aim to elevate the perception and raise awareness of the Corridor, and they seek to balance the needs of property owners with the area's natural capacity.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



## POLICY

### ZONING OVERLAY

- Vehicular access management
- Impervious surface reduction
- Pedestrian safety and mobility
- Control setbacks
- Post development/retroactive stream bank and slope stabilization



## PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

- Coordinate Stakeholders to regularly convene to pursue Implementation
- Evaluate progress
- Develop preferred strategy for managing parcels
- Conduct routine flood modeling assessments



## DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Prioritize Design Focus Areas
- Develop the preferred option for managing the corridor
- Identify key partners and prioritize funding opportunities
- Seek funding for projects in the priority focus areas

# Path to Implementation

## OBSTACLES

- Lack of coordination between the many agencies and organizations that work within the corridor.
- Difficulty of enforcing policy changes to existing development
- Degree of improvement needed for degraded stream and right-of-way current conditions

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Preventing missed opportunities by narrowing effort to Design Focus Areas
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Amount of publicly-owned land adjacent to Saw Mill Run
- Comprehensive planning work

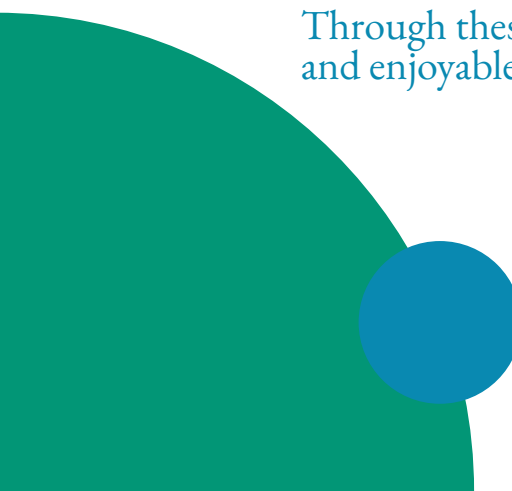
# SUMMARY

The Master Site Development Plan for the Saw Mill Run Corridor envisions short- and long-term changes essential to creating a Green Boulevard within the limits of today's opportunities and challenges.

**While the most transformational changes will result from updates to policies and regulations affecting the Corridor, these changes will be best supported by visible improvements that benefit the appearance, safety, resilience, and identity of the Corridor for those live near it, work in it, or drive through it on a daily basis**

However, improvements in the Corridor are hindered by a lack of coordination between the many agencies and organizations that work within it. Seeking routine collaboration and leveraging related improvements are essential steps to implementing the recommendations of the Master Site Development Plan.

Through these changes, the Saw Mill Run Corridor can become a Green Boulevard – a safe and enjoyable space for those who use it to live, work, and commute for generations to come.





# Acknowledgements

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Boulevard Master Plan



THE HEINZ  
ENDOWMENTS  
HOWARD HEINZ ENDOWMENT  
VIRA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT

