



# MON VALLEY INVESTIGATION: AMBASSADOR FEASIBILITY STUDY

PREPARED FOR: **THE BENEDUM FOUNDATION**





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GTECH (Growth Through Energy + Community Health) Strategies works with the goal of engaging residents and building the strength of communities. Throughout Allegheny County, GTECH works to convert liabilities into opportunities through a people and place approach. One method to accomplish the transition of underutilized vacant land into vibrant green community assets is the ReClaim Ambassador model.

In order to expand GTECH's Ambassador model into the broader region, the organization initiated investigative work in the Monongahela River Valley in May of 2014. The Ambassador program empowers residents to take ownership over these vacant spaces by providing them with the educational and financial tools necessary to transform them into public green spaces. The goal of this investigation was the thoughtful selection of one community to launch an Ambassador model within, and subsequent action plans for all of the communities engaged.

The goals for the investigation are as follows:

- 1. Select five communities to conduct a deeper investigation**
- 2. Create standardized criteria for selection**
- 3. Conduct mapping and vacancy analysis**
- 4. Select one suitable community for Ambassador model**
- 5. Define scope of the Ambassador model**

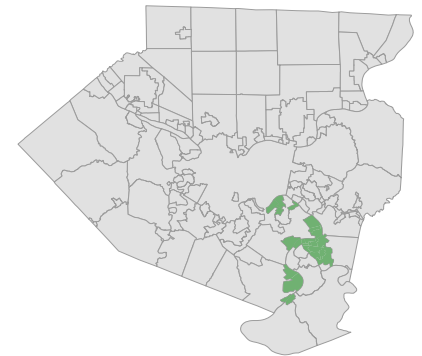
Throughout the investigative phase of this project, GTECH Strategies compiled community profiles for the originally proposed nine communities along the Monongahela River Valley. Based on a uniform set of criteria including size, vacancy rates and municipal capacity, (further outlined in the methods section), the information gathered led to the selection of five communities to explore further. A capacity inventory of each of the five communities, including a mapping and

vacancy analysis, was conducted. Ultimately, final selection based on priority alignment, capacity and land control was made, and the City of McKeesport was selected to host an Ambassador programming model for the 2014 - 2015 season.



# INTRODUCTION

Once home to some of the largest steel and industrial centers in the country, the Monongahela River Valley was an economic power house. The collapse of these industries has led to the decline of once thriving and prosperous communities along the banks of the Monongahela River. This economic decline has resulted in a large exodus from these communities, culminating in years of physical decay of a once vibrant urban fabric. As buildings and other structures have deteriorated and demolished, unmaintained vacant land has taken their place. These vacant spaces now represent an opportunity for crime, neglect and disinvestment that can rapidly spread to healthier areas that remain.



In addition to the negative consequences they carry, vacant land also represents underutilized opportunity. To encourage the transition of these lots back into productive uses in communities throughout Allegheny County, GTECH developed the Ambassador model. The Ambassador model incorporates a twofold approach, considering both people-centered empowerment and place-based action. The goals of the model are to recruit, train, and empower residents to make a difference in their community by transitioning a blighted vacant space into a green asset. Past projects completed by ReClaim Ambassadors have included food gardens, trail heads, parklets and recreational spaces.

## AMBASSADOR FEASIBILITY STUDY

In order to select a community to host an Ambassador model in the Monongahela Valley, a two part investigation was launched in the summer of 2014. Phase 1 of the investigation consisted of a scan of nine different communities in the Monongahela Valley to assess basic requirements needed to launch an Ambassador program. These requirements included elements such as the number of vacant lots, population and municipality

size. The nine communities under investigation during Phase 1 included Clairton, Dravosburg, Duquesne, Elizabeth, Homestead, McKeesport, West Elizabeth, West Homestead and Whitaker. Phase 2 of the investigation involved a in-depth investigation that included interviews with government officials, outreach to community organizations and capacity assessments in Clairton, Duquesne, Homestead, McKeesport and West Homestead. The ultimate goal of Phase 2 was identifying one community in which to design and implement an Ambassador model.

## WHO WE ARE

GTECH Strategies is a Pittsburgh based, nonprofit social enterprise whose mission is to cultivate the unrealized potential of people and places by creating opportunities that improve the economic, social, and environmental health of our communities. GTECH's ReClaim program assists communities in assessing appropriate strategies and careful planning for vacant land. The program offers support in the implementation of on-the-ground actions and volunteer efforts in correlation with the reclamation of vacant land into valuable community assets. Community engagement, education and data driven action plans for vacant land are key components to strengthening community capacity. These components can be integrated into the stabilization and transition of vacant lots into valuable open space in communities.

ReClaim is a program that works with residents to transform vacant, blighted land in their neighborhoods into green, vibrant places. The ReClaim team, composed of designers, policy specialists, social innovators, landscape architects and community organizers, works with community groups to carry out transitional strategies while working towards a sustainable reuse for each vacant lot.

GTECH has been successful with neighborhood scale initiatives in the past, including ReClaim South and two iterations of ReClaim Northside. The community selected in the Monongahela Valley will be GTECH's first Ambassador model to take place outside the City of Pittsburgh.

## OUR PARTNERS

Partners are a critical component during the investigative process. To make sure accurate information was gathered and appropriate organizations were contacted, the Steel Valley Council of Government (SVCOG) and the Twin Rivers Council of Government (TRCOG) were solicited to provide input and feedback throughout the investigation. These two organizations will also be involved in project steps after the investigation has been completed.





# COMMUNITY PROFILES

This section highlights the nine municipalities selected during the first phase of the investigation. Important statistics in the selection of the five communities for a in-depth Phase 2 investigation have been highlighted. These include things such as population, municipality size and number of vacant lots. Additional background information has also been provided to give each municipality context.

## clairton

Population: 6,796

Size: 2.97 square miles

Median Income: \$27,408

Number of Vacant Lots: 1128

Clairton is home to Clairton Works, the largest producer of coke in the United States. A coal and steel heavy legacy includes a variety of companies and industries. Clairton sits at one end of the Montour Trail, a rail to trail recreation project that extends between Clairton and Coraopolis, PA. Today, Clairton faces air quality issues stemming from it's heavy industrial past.



## dravosburg

Population: 1,792

Size: .99 square miles

Median Income: \$41,918

Number of Vacant Lots: 143

Dravosburg is a small municipality located across the river from the city of McKeesport in Allegheny County. A coal city, the Monangahela River served as a means of transporting the coal from Dravosburg to nearby cities.





### duquesne

**Population:** 5,565  
**Size:** 1.88 sq miles  
**Median Income:** \$20,330  
**Number of Vacant Lots:** 938

Duquesne was home to Duquesne Works, a US Steel mill. Once home to the largest Blast Furnace in the world (Bob Dylan wrote a song about it - Duquesne Whistle), Duquesne today faces severe population decline.



### elizabeth

**Population:** 1,493  
**Size:** .52 sq miles  
**Median Income:** \$40,750  
**Number of Vacant Lots:** 118

One of the first townships in Allegheny County, Elizabeth is located towards the southern edge of the county. Well known for the former Nike anti-aircraft missile site, Elizabeth also has an industry heavy history, everything from coal to ship building happened here.



### homestead

**Population:** 3,165  
**Size:** .6 square miles  
**Median Income:** \$32,593  
**Number of Vacant Lots:** 665

Homestead Borough is right across the river from the city of Pittsburgh. Home to the popular Waterfront shopping center, it remains a major attraction for city residents. Known by historians for the Homestead Strike of 1982, the area has an industrial legacy, home to steel mills and coke works. Today, the Great Allegheny Passage runs through the borough.

### mckeesport

**Population: 19,731**

**Size: 5.15 square miles**

**Median Income: \$26,608**

**Number of Vacant Lots: 2780**

McKeesport, the second largest city in Allegheny County, was home to US Steels National Tube Works plant, which employed much of the area. The city's history includes notable events - visits from George Washington, John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Today, the city is battling population decline and undergoing a revitalization process.



### west elizabeth

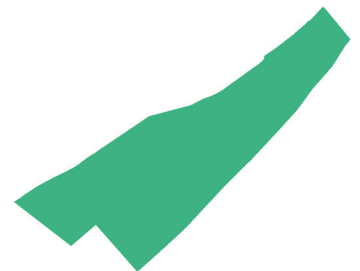
**Population: 518**

**Size: .25 square miles**

**Median Income: \$39,432**

**Number of Vacant Lots: 54**

West Elizabeth is a small borough located in the southern region of Allegheny County. Historically an industry heavy town, the major industries included coal and ship building. The Monongahela River played a big role in the history, transporting coal to Pittsburgh by barge.



### west homestead

**Population: 1,929**

**Size: .82 square miles**

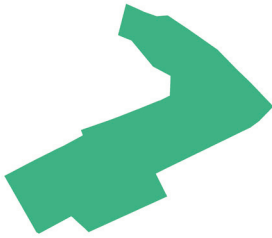
**Median Income: \$49,559**

**Number of Vacant Lots: 270**

Geographically located across the river from Pittsburgh, next to Homestead, the borough of West Homestead is also known for its industrial legacy. Home to many steel mills and manufacturing industries, the borough shares the Waterfront shopping area



with its neighboring municipalities, and is home to the popular Sandcastle Water Park.



whitaker

**Population: 1,271**

**Size: .26 square miles**

**Median Income: \$37,419**

**Number of Vacant Lots:**

Whitaker is a small town located along the Monangahela River, about seven miles south of Pittsburgh. Originally the Whitaker family farm, the area is now a small town with a bustling business corridor full of shops and restaurants.



# METHODOLOGY

The methodology for selecting a community for an Ambassador model occurred in two phases from May until August of 2014. Clairton, Duquesne, Homestead, West Homestead McKeesport, Whitaker, West Elizabeth, Elizabeth and Dravosburg were a part of the study. Phase 1 placed importance on borough size and community infrastructure, while Phase 2 focused on available vacant land, enthusiasm for the program and partner identification. These phases are further outlined below.

## PHASE 1

Four categories were identified to evaluate the potential implementation of an Ambassador model during Phase 1 of the investigation. These categories included: borough size, vacancy, existing interest and capacity. The four categories were then weighted on a scale 1-3 (1 being low and 3 being high), according to their relative importance. It was determined that of the four categories, borough size was the most heavily weighted category, as logistical concerns meant we were focusing on having one community host all of the Ambassadors. A large pool of residents as well as a strong municipal presence are both critical for a successful Ambassador program. Vacancy and capacity are two important factors as well, and were each given a weight of 2. Finally, existing interest (encompassing both municipality and community knowledge and priorities surrounding vacant land and other eco-related activities) was given a weight of 1. Each community was then rated, based on the research completed, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being low and 5 being high) in each of the categories. Scores are available in *Table 1-1*.

Based on initial findings, the weighted scores of the four categories in the decision matrix and additional information from the U.S. Census and Allegheny County Assessment files, the five communities selected for a more detailed investigation were Clairton, Duquesne, Homestead, West Homestead and McKeesport.

Decision Factors	Weight	Clairton	Dravosburg	Duquesne	Elizabeth	Homestead
Borough Size	3	3	3	3	2	3
Vacancy Rate	2	2	1	2	1	2
Existing Interest	1	3	2	3	1	4
Capacity	2	3	3	3	2	3
Weighted Scores		22	19	22	13	23

Decision Factors	Weight	McKeesport	West Homestead	West Elizabeth	Whitaker
Borough Size	3	4	3	1	2
Vacancy Rate	2	3	1	1	1
Existing Interest	1	3	3	1	2
Capacity	2	3	3	2	2
Weighted Scores		27	20	10	14

Table 1.1: The weighted scores and decision factors for reducing the nine communities to five for further investigation. Those municipalities with the highest score are in purple.

## PHASE 2

The next phase of the investigation included in-depth research of various organizations and institutions that work in the five municipalities. These were broken down into three categories, macro, mezzo and micro based on the area that these organizations served. Macro organizations were those who provided services regionally or county-wide. These included organizations like GASP and the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development. Mezzo organizations were those that worked specifically in the Monongahela River Valley, such as the Mon Valley Initiative. Finally, micro organizations were those that worked in one municipality or neighborhood inside that municipality. These included block watches and other community-based organizations. Each level of organization allowed us to gain the context necessary for establishing an Ambassador model and gave us insight into resources and potential partnerships.

Research included identification of appropriate community based organizations, municipal staff including borough and city managers, council members, as well as other organizations working in the area. Additionally we looked at the vacancy rates and land ownership in the communities. Further breaking down the vacant parcels into public vs private ownership allowed us to develop programmatic themes and determine the scale of possible projects.

This resulted in four potential program structures for the Ambassador model that are outlined below.

- 1. Traditional Model: 10 Ambassadors - 10 Projects**
- 2. Hybrid Model: 10 Ambassadors - 3 Projects**
- 3. Hybrid Model: 10 Ambassadors - 1 Project**
- 4. Hybrid Model: 1 Task Force with Recommendations**

The first would be the traditional Ambassador model, where one

Ambassador works on one vacant lot (10 Ambassadors/10 projects). The second and third seek to address the problem of a reduced number of publicly owned vacant lots, and would consist of Ambassadors teaming up both in effort and capital to address a smaller number of vacant lots. One potential program would be the 10 Ambassadors working in teams of 3 (each team member would be responsible for one of the following areas: Outreach, Site Design and Access and Project Implementation) to address 3 vacant lots (10 Ambassadors/3 projects). The other would be ten Ambassadors working on one larger scale project, working in teams of 3-4 in each of the aforementioned categories to create and implement a larger-impact project (10 Ambassadors/1 project). The fourth and final prospective program framework would consist of a Task Force of government officials, business owners and invested community members who work together to outline and design a 'green plan' for their community that serves as recommendations for future development and identifies specific projects to be addressed to meet specific goals (1 task force/recommendations).

In order to maximize the impact for communities, broader themes were researched and potential projects outlined. These themes included storm water management, air quality, alternative energy generation, trails and water access, business corridor redevelopment, green zone, industrial tract redevelopment, and food desert mitigation. Each of these themes was then detailed to include a potential project for each of the four program structures identified above, and was assessed based on feasibility. A feasibility chart can be seen in *Appendix A*.

With these themes and structures in mind, organizations and officials were identified and met with. These organizations were classified on the macro, mezzo and micro scale. Those organizations on the macro scale were larger institutions that work throughout the region, covering most, if not all of the area under investigation.

Those organizations and officials classified as meso usually worked in multiple municipalities under study, but lacked a larger umbrella pres-



ence that covered a comprehensive understanding of the entire region. Finally, those organizations classified as micro were specific to one community.

On the macro level, there were relatively few organizations who worked with a large area, and still had specific ties to one of our communities. On the mezzo level, we met with organizations who worked with a small range of communities. On the micro level were the majority of the municipal, city and borough staff. For the most part, they focused on their specific community and how our programming could fit in with municipal plans.

For more information about the organizations and governments that we interviewed, a detailed chart showing organizations and municipal staff, contact information and dates of meetings is shown in *Appendix B*.



# MAPPING

## MAPPING ANALYSIS

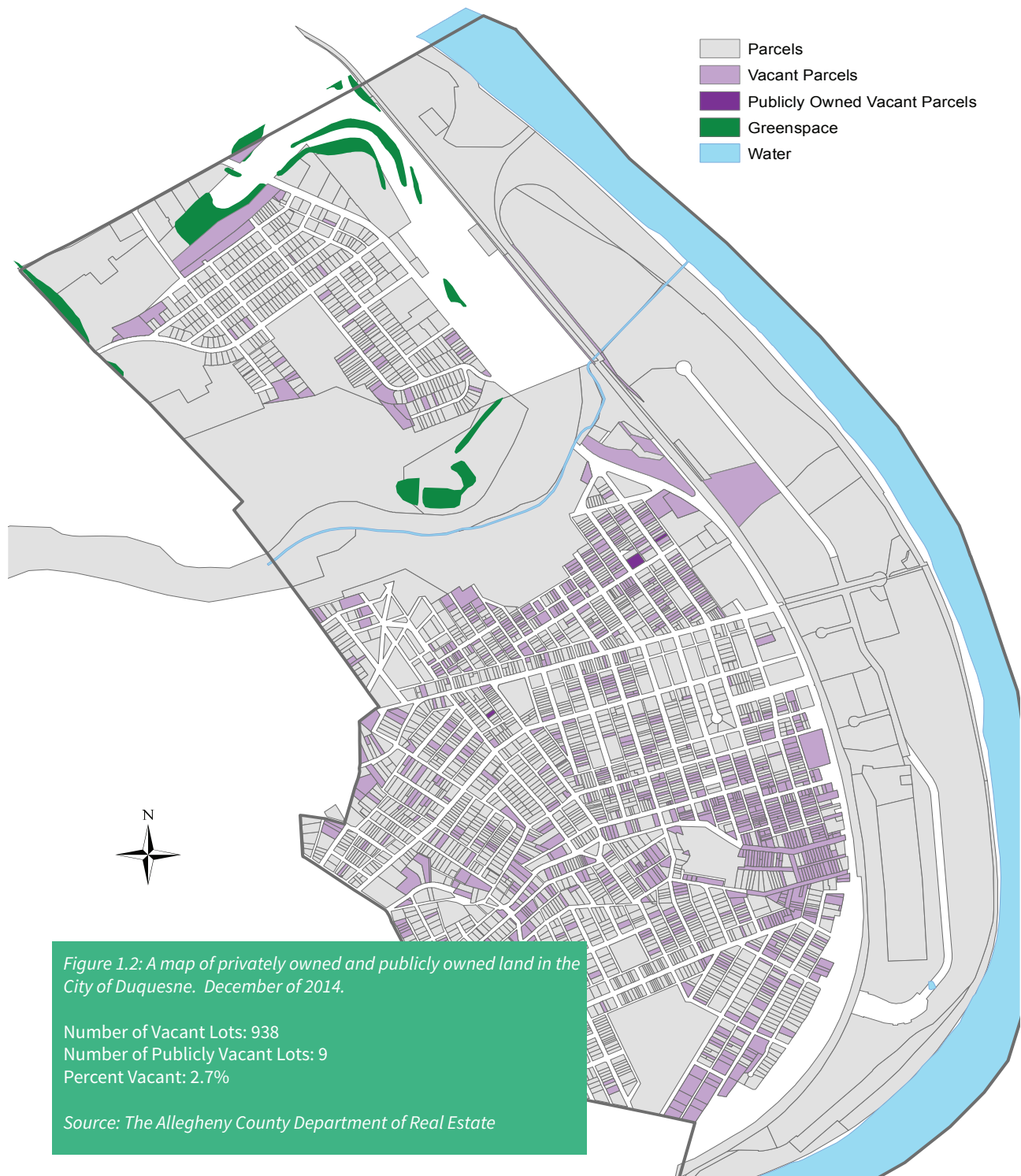
A mapping and vacancy analysis was completed for each of the five communities. Maps of the communities were created that show parcels and highlight publicly owned vacant parcels. An emphasis was placed on publicly owned land as many private land owners are absent and there are limited ways to gain access for the implementation of projects. **The analysis found a total of 5,303 vacant lots spread across the five municipalities with McKeesport having the highest amount of vacant lots and the largest percentage of those lots owned by public entities including municipality, redevelopment authority, and school districts.**

Public entities represent potential partners for Ambassador programming due to the fact that they have a shared vision for improving their communities and can provide either public support or resources for the model. The following maps (Figures 1.1 through 1.5) show parcel level data of vacancy in each community, and highlight publicly owned vacant land.

# clairton



# duquesne



# homestead



*Figure 1.3: A map of privately owned and publicly owned land in the Borough of Homestead. December of 2014.*

Number of Vacant Lots: 665  
Number of Publicly Vacant Lots: 24  
Percent Vacant: 13.1%

*Source: The Allegheny County Department of Real Estate*



# mckeesport

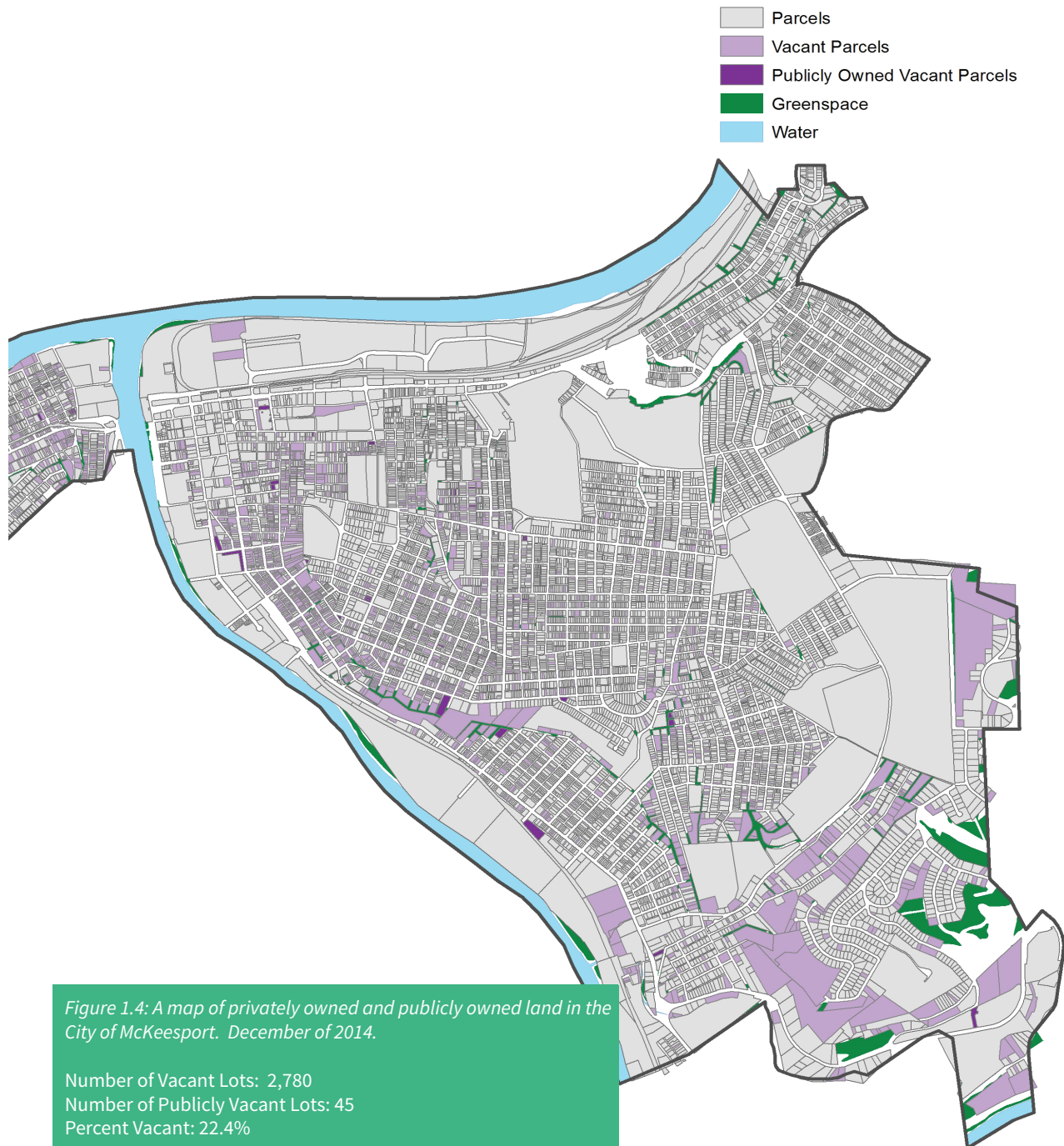


Figure 1.4: A map of privately owned and publicly owned land in the City of McKeesport. December of 2014.

Number of Vacant Lots: 2,780  
Number of Publicly Vacant Lots: 45  
Percent Vacant: 22.4%

Source: The Allegheny County Department of Real Estate

# west homestead



Figure 1.5: A map of privately owned and publicly owned land in the Borough of West Homestead. December of 2014.

Number of Vacant Lots: 270  
Number of Publicly Vacant Lots: 45  
Percent Vacant: 14.7%

Source: The Allegheny County Department of Real Estate



# FINDINGS

Based on the results of the vacancy analysis and information and ideas gathered from meetings with various entities, a scoring system for the communities was developed. For this round of the investigation, six categories were established:

- 1. Municipality Size/Vacant Land Availability**
- 2. Resident Engagement/ Education**
- 3. Municipality Enthusiasm**
- 4. Community Infrastructure**
- 5. Financial/Business Sector Health**
- 6. Plan for Sustainability/Maintenance**

Again, these categories were ranked on their relative importance, on a scale of 1-4 (4 being high, 1 being low). Categories 1 (Municipality Size and Vacant Land Availability) and 3 (Municipality Enthusiasm) are most important for implementation of an Ambassador model, followed by Community Infrastructure and Resident Engagement. The Financial/Business Sector and Plan for Sustainability categories were each given a weighted score of 2.

Based on review of community development plans, meetings with municipal leaders and informational talks with community based organizations and nonprofits working deliberately in these areas, communities were ranked on a scale of 1-5 in each of the categories (1 being low and 5 being high).

Decision Factors	Weight	Clairton	Duquesne	Homestead	McKeesport	West Homestead
Municipality Size and Vacant Land Availability	4	2.5	2.5	3	3.5	2
Resident Engagement/ Education on Subject Matter	3	2	2	3	2	2
Municipal Staff Enthusiasm	4	0*	2	5	5	5
Community Capacity	3	2	2	3	4	2
Private Interest or Business Support	2	2	2	3	3	2
Plan for Sustainability and Project Maintenance	2	2	4	4	4	4
<b>Weighted Scores</b>		30	42	64	66	52

\* Clairton received a municipality enthusiasm score of 0 as a result of our inability to get in touch with a representative, despite multiple outreach efforts.

Table 1.2: The weighted scores and decision factors for limiting the 5 communities to 1 for the purpose of launching the next Ambassador program. Those municipalities with the highest score are in purple.

The communities with the highest score based on our selected criteria were Homestead, West Homestead and McKeesport. However, due to the small size of West Homestead and Homestead compared to McKeesport, and the high levels of cross municipal cooperation between West Homestead and Homestead, it was decided that the two they should be looked at and considered together as a package. To make the final decision, comparison of the two areas and the potential for success was completed.

<b>Decision Factors</b>	<b>Homestead and West Homestead</b>	<b>McKeesport</b>
<b>Municipality Size and Vacant Land Availability</b>	Smaller municipalities, less publicly owned vacant land, no redevelopment authority present.	Larger municipality, more publicly owned vacant land, more residents, redevelopment authority present.
<b>Resident Engagement/ Education on Subject Matter</b>	Identified small group of residents who would be “low hanging fruit”.	Identified small group of residents who would be “low hanging fruit”.
<b>Municipal Staff Enthusiasm</b>	Very good. Opportunity for cross-municipal cooperation.	Very good.
<b>Community Capacity</b>	MVI (limited), Borough Garden, The Batch Foundation, CMU Plan, Green Scan (WPC), GTECH grants and partners.	Comprehensive Plan, UPMC McKeesport Foundation, The Batch Foundation, Penn State, Tube City Renaissance, Kiwanis Community Garden.
<b>Private Interest or Business Support</b>	Efforts to revamp Central business district, a lot of vacancy/blighted buildings along 8th ave business corridor.	Good strong local central business district, comprehensive plan for redevelopment (with Duquesne).
<b>Plan for Sustainability and Project Maintenance</b>	Possible problem due to amount of projects, small group of dedicated residents and small pool of money.	Unknown. Follow up needed.

*Table 1.3: A comparison of the decision factors for the two final options in preparing for the launch of an Ambassador model in the Monongahela River Valley. The municipality with the highest score is in purple.*

One of the initial goals of this investigation proposal was to build off previous GTECH successes in the neighborhood scale initiatives, and implement a similar program outside the City of Pittsburgh. This investigation was critical in determining a suitable location in which an Ambassador model would make an appropriate fit for dealing with vacant land related issues in a particular community. For a variety of reasons listed previously in this report, McKeesport was chosen as the community to launch an Ambassador model in the Monongahela Valley. Based on meetings with local municipal staff, vacant land availability, and general community as well as staff capacity, it was decided that the traditional Ambassador model (10 Ambassadors, 10 projects) would be the most appropriate fit for the City of McKeesport.



# NEXT STEPS

## RECLAIM MCKEESPORT

McKeesport is a distressed community. Over the course of 50 years, the city has seen a 65% reduction in population shifting from a population of 55,355 in 1940 to 19,731 in 2010. This number continues to decrease today. The loss of a substantial portion of the tax base paired with a loss of industry surrounded by communities throughout the Mon Valley equally depleted of an economic base has yielded a community of significant distress.

As of 2013, 23% of residents in McKeesport lived below the poverty level. This is twice the average of the state of Pennsylvania. In addition to this, 51% of children in the city currently live below the poverty level, a staggering three times the average of the entire state. Adding to these figures is the amount of vacancy and blight located in the community. Vacancy and blight are two of the most prominent indicators of distress in communities. Currently, the City of McKeesport has approximately 2,780 vacant lots and nearly twice as many vacant or abandoned homes. Estimates completed in 2014 have shown that approximately 800 of these homes need to be demolished due to public safety concerns.

The 2,780 vacant lots in McKeesport represent 18% of the city's landmass or nearly 614 acres. ReClaim McKeesport has engaged 11 Ambassadors and associated networks through 9 projects that will begin to address the chronic issues related to vacancy and blight.

## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Realizing the magnitude of work that needs to be done around the issue of blight remediation and prevention in the Mon Valley, it was decided that with the help of our partners, a task force would be

created from the municipalities selected for Phase 2 of this investigation. This task force, facilitated by GTECH, the Steel Valley Council of Government and the Twin Rivers Council of Government focused on new techniques and technologies available to municipalities for blight prevention. Specifically, representatives from each municipality received training through four educational sessions on LocalData. LocalData is a cloud-based data collection platform used for the standardization of data collection and dissemination of a variety of factors that impact community development decisions. By providing a platform that allows for a comprehensive data analysis between various municipalities, LocalData provides a streamlined and simplified process for gathering data that informs actions to improve communities.

As part of the agreement for participating in the sessions, each municipality receives 20 hours of data collection in their community. Data collection efforts focus on an assessment of both vacant land and vacant structures, due to the fact that municipalities frequently do not know the condition or status of their vacant properties. Having a real time picture of the status of these properties allows for them to be sorted into recommendation categories (demolition, enhanced code enforcement, greening strategies) in order for scarce resources to be applied strategically and maximize their impact.

The final set of data will also be used in the Healthy Homes Analysis, a project of SVCOG. The Healthy Housing Analysis will be an in-depth study that assesses residential market conditions and identifies market strengths and potential assets. Residential property condition data will be collected in-the-field using wireless devices and cloud based technology. The analysis will be completed by the Tri-COG Collaborative in partnership with the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. Municipalities will receive community maps that detail the data uncovered in the housing market analysis. Municipalities will participate in housing market strategies training based on the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania's Healthy Housing Market Paradigm. At the conclusion of the analysis, municipalities will have a foundation for a housing action plan including

potential properties for land bank acquisition.

## BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Due to the success of ReClaim McKeesport and a desire from partners to continue programming, GTECH has reaffirmed our commitment to both the City of McKeesport and the Mon Valley. With a presence in the region as well as the city, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) has expressed interest in assisting in the support of follow up activities to ReClaim McKeesport. This potential for an enhanced partnership is in addition to a relationship with the McKeesport Hospital Foundation, an affiliated foundation of UPMC McKeesport, through ReClaim McKeesport.

Moving forward, activities will include a re-engagement of McKeesport Ambassadors paired with the addition of new participants in the expansion of reclamation projects, educational programming as well as the enhancement and upgrades to existing community assets. Due to the extreme percentages of families, in particular children, living under the poverty level, new programming will involve a focus on youth engagement, and the integration and alignment of place based projects and youth oriented programming.

Additionally, a key component in maximizing the impact of all initiatives related to community development in McKeesport will be a focus on building resiliency and improving overall community health. A comprehensive community health study that looks at the people, place and performance of McKeesport will be critical in outlining strategic next steps that amplify any future investments. These partnerships and potential of new sources of funding will hopefully serve as an ideal foundation for continued capacity building throughout the Mon Valley targeting vacant land as a platform for community revitalization.



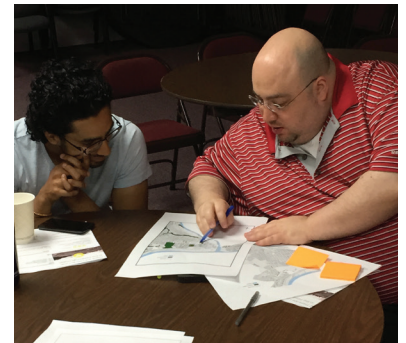


# INTERIM REPORT

## OUTCOME 1

### **Conduct vacant land assessment in five Mon Valley communities.**

Over the course of the past eight months GTECH has successfully completed an assessment of the vacant land in five Mon Valley municipalities. Privately and publicly owned vacant land was assessed in West Homestead, Homestead, Duquesne, McKeesport and Clairton. This was done in order to determine the suitability and scope of an Ambassador program in one of the communities listed. The results of this assessment have been detailed in this report.



## OUTCOME 2

### **Recruit and train two Ambassadors from each community to organize specific reclamation projects.**

As a result of this investigation it was determined that an Ambassador model that recruited 10-12 individuals from one community would be preferred. When thinking about a model that recruited two Ambassadors from five communities, there were several logistical concerns that arose around the training of the Ambassadors as well as the implementation of their projects. By selecting Ambassadors who were from McKeesport we could focus our resources on one community that had the most appropriate infrastructure, but also a high need for an Ambassador program. Recruiting Ambassadors from one community also allowed us to effectively leverage resources and develop strong relationships with partners (such as the City of McKeesport, several faith based institutions, youth organizations and the McKeesport Area School District) in the continued support of the Ambassador's personal development and project implementation. This has also resulted in



highly successful projects that are ingrained in the community to date.

## OUTCOME 3



### **Distribute mini-grants to implement specific reuse plans.**

To date, 7 of 9 Ambassadors have begun their projects and are beginning to spend down their micro-grants with the other 2 well on their way. There is a variety in the types of projects that Ambassadors have designed with their \$3,000 budget in mind. Projects include trail heads, children's playspaces, public spaces for community gatherings and gateway gardens. As of the end of May, we have engaged 112 volunteers in 623 hours of community service towards the implementation of Ambassador projects.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Three of four phases have been completed to date. Those completed stages and a progress report are provided below.



### **Phase 1: Investigation**

The investigative phase of this project began in May of 2014 and ended in August of 2014. During that time, more than a dozen separate interviews were held with municipal staff and representatives, local non-profits and other community and economic development institutions that work in the Mon Valley. An Ambassador model and scope was created based off of a vacant land analysis and decision matrix completed in 5 of 9 communities in the study. The result of this investigation was the selection of McKeesport as the community that would host the first Ambassador model outside of the City of Pittsburgh.

### **Phase 2: Recruitment**

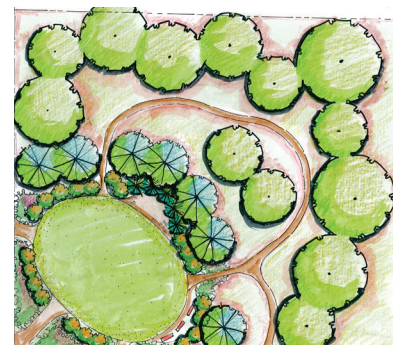
Recruitment of Ambassadors for the ReClaim McKeesport project lasted

from August to September of 2014. Our goal for applications was set at 25 with 10 of those selected as Ambassadors. The final count exceeded our goals, with 38 applicants and 11 Ambassadors selected at the end of September. This was accredited to a high amount of enthusiasm shown by local representatives and residents for the program, as well as an early partnership with the McKeesport Hospital Foundation, which assisted with recruitment. Meetings were held with local organizations like the McKeesport Trail Commission, the Kiwanis Club, the Lions Club, the McKeesport Ministerium and the McKeesport SHIP, which helped garner interest from the 38 individuals in applying for the program. Events, such as the International Village and other tabling opportunities combined with advertisements by the Daily News and Tube City Media outlets also helped with increasing the project's exposure and overall interest.



### **Phase 3: Educational Sessions**

From October of 2014 to April of 2015 11 Ambassadors logged 220 hours in 10 educational sessions that outlined the project planning and development process critical to long-term success. Classes focused on key topical areas that ranged from site assessment and design to volunteer recruitment and management. During this time, we were able to include external partners and professionals and former Ambassadors to enrich the quality of the materials presented.



Included in these educational sessions were two networking events aimed at increasing public awareness about each project. The first held in February was a community forum hosted by the Ambassadors that blended the ReClaim McKeesport project with local and regional youth organizations. In addition to inviting the public to learn more about their projects, the Ambassadors also wanted to provide families with the opportunity to learn more about youth engagement opportunities in the McKeesport community, a critical issue to many in the city. The result was a forum attended by 13 organizations and 80 individuals.



The second networking event was held in April and was an opportunity for the Ambassadors to present their project designs and inspirations to the entire community. Held at Founders Hall Middle School, the event drew nearly 100 people that came out to hear more about the Ambassador projects and how they could support each project.

#### **Phase 4: Implementation**

From May until October of 2015, Ambassadors will work on implementing their projects. All 10 will be completed at the conclusion of the project in October, which will be celebrated with a graduation ceremony to be held shortly thereafter. As of the end of May, all projects had either begun or had volunteer days scheduled.

# APPENDIX A: FEASIBILITY

	Likely to work well, given scope, time frame and budget of project.
	Potentially feasible, highly dependent on number, location and type of parcels, quality/quantity of Ambassadors and partners.
	Not feasible, given the scope, budget and time frame of project.

Project Theme	Execution Type	Project Examples	Key Partners
Air Quality	10 amb/10 projects	Small scale greening projects of vacant lots Street trees Gardens	ReEnergize Pgh
Air Quality	Task Force	Policy actions, Outreach, SIP Implementation, Clean up efforts, US Steel Relations	ReEnergize Pgh
Air Quality	10 amb/3-5 projects	3 sites with greening component Air quality measurement is publicly displayed for educational purposes	ReEnergize Pgh
Air Quality	10 amb/1 project	One group site implementation for greening strategy, One group for education and outreach, One group for site design and site selection	ReEnergize Pgh
Stormwater	10 amb/10 projects	Small scale greening projects of vacant lots Street trees, Gardens	Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC)
Stormwater	Task Force	Policy actions, Outreach, ALCOSAN relations Strategic planning, Green Task Force oriented	WPC
Stormwater	10 amb/3-5 projects	3 capital projects (larger in scale) 3 different types of stormwater management Outreach and educational component (signage, etc). Could make these a series of hubs and focus on flow of water between them.	WPC
Stormwater	10 amb/1 project	Large capital project requiring engineering background One team for site selection and design, One team for implementation, One team for policy, education and outreach.	WPC
Business Corridor	10 amb/10 projects	Could address multiple issues on several sites 10 small scale “green and screen” type projects along one corridor -Small scale greening projects	Mon Yough Chamber of Commerce
Business Corridor	Task Force	How could this model be replicated throughout business districts, Policy and planning actions Mix of business owners and government officials Green Task Force oriented. Incorporate aspects of green economy, green building zones, incentives for local businesses to “go green”, green design mandates...etc...	Mon Yough Chamber of Commerce
Business Corridor	10 amb/3-5 projects	More money for longer term or larger scale projects. Could be appropriate if access to public land along corridor is unavailable. Groups of ambassadors share responsibilities of design, outreach and implementation. All do a part but work together.	Mon Yough Chamber of Commerce
Business Corridor	10 amb/1 project	Scale moves down in number of lots transformed but project is larger. One team focused on design and implementation. Another group focused on producing long-term plan for corridor. (Complete streets, greening amenities, etc.) Also would be responsible for public outreach and education including some type of charette activity.	Mon Yough Chamber of Commerce
Green Zone	10 amb/10 projects	Small scale vacant lot design, ideally working in close proximity to each other. Potential to focus on a multitude of issues to “green” the community (ex. air quality, street trees, food garden, community greenspace, parklets, stormwater management...)	
Green Zone	Task Force	Policy and strategic planning for overall greening of a community or portion of a community. Umbrella project that could encapsulate a wide range of topics. (ex. stormwater management, air quality, food desert, trail access, green building, land use, possible rezoning, green businesses...etc)	
Green Zone	10 amb/3-5 projects	Smaller scale projects. Teams of ambassadors working on education, policy, outreach and awareness in addition to sites. Can have aspects of stormwater management, air quality, urban farms, trail access, alternative energy - with potential cohesive ties as pieces of green zone - ideally would be close together and accessed by walking/bike trails.	
Green Zone	10 amb/1 project	focused on education and promotion of green zones, large scale project incorporating one or more of the aspects of a green zone, outreach, team set up. One team on edu/outreach. One team on site design. One team on implementation.	
Industrial Tract	10 amb/10 projects	Small “brownfields” (Laundromats., gas stations, etc). Small scale greening projects.	Regional Industrial Development Corporation (RIDC)



# APPENDIX A: FEASIBILITY

Industrial Tract	Task Force	Examining properties available, Master planning process, Looking at potential private and public uses, Site contamination and cleanup, Policy recommendations and funding options	RIDC
Industrial Tract	10 amb/3-5 projects	Educational sessions tailored around history, economic forces, contamination issues, site design and implementation. Projects scaled according to need on site (some may be remediation and some may be able to be for public greening.Charette and public outreach component necessary.	RIDC
Industrial Tract	10 amb/1 project	Heavily focused around education of remediation and cleanup processes. Guest speakers on issues surrounding brownfields. Partner with schools or universities. Planning and policy sessions. Site design and implementation to be determined on scale and condition of site. GTECH sunflower projects. Biodiversity components.	RIDC
Food Desert	10 amb/10 projects	Traditional greening project. 10 gardens on 10 vacant lots. All ambassadors work on all components of access, design and implementation.	Grow Pittsburgh
Food Desert	Task Force	Study of food access in the region. Identify areas of need and vulnerable populations. Determine buffers around supermarkets and other food amenities. Policy and planning combined with tangible next steps for garden installations. Could look at food supply networks as well.	Grow Pittsburgh
Food Desert	10 amb/3-5 projects	More emphasis on education than site design. Focus on community partnerships. Outreach of how gardens benefit communities.	Grow Pittsburgh
Food Desert	10 amb/1 project	Team structure. One team on site access and design. One team on implementation. One team on policy and outreach.	Grow Pittsburgh
Trails/Water Access	10 amb/10 projects	10 small scale greening projects. Trailheads, trail maintenance, etc.  Educational signage and outreach component.	Student Conservation Association (SCA)/ Pittsburgh Trail Advocacy Group (PTAG)/ATA
Trails/Water Access	Task Force	Policy and planning for how to make sustainable networks. How do we incorporate these designs into neighborhoods they are near?How do we give local businesses incentives to support these projects? Overall focus on alternative transportation options for communities.	SCA/PTAG Allegheny Trail Alliance(ATA)
Trails/Water Access	10 amb/3-5 projects	Larger scale projects along trails. Groups could be divided in order to reach out to communities about alternative transportation methods. Trailheads, recreational sports, bike maintenance, planning initiatives.	SCA/PTAG Allegheny Trail Alliance
Trails/Water Access	10 amb/1 project	Similar project, larger in scale. Team divisions. One team on site access and design. One team on implementation. One team on "sustainable community connections"	SCA/PTAG Allegheny Trail Alliance
Alternative Energy Generation	10 amb/10 projects	Small scale alternative energy (ex. DIY solar panels) with educational component.	
Alternative Energy Generation	Task Force	Strategic planning for types of alternative energy in Mon Valley Communities (i.e. wind, solar, etc) . Public policies on alternative energy generation. How can we make it easier to do so. Resident outreach and education. Long term planning and funding options.	
Alternative Energy Generation	10 amb/3-5 projects	Larger scaled projects. Could be a demonstration of three different types of alternative energy. Maybe a team solely dedicated to public outreach.	
Alternative Energy Generation	10 amb/1 project	Team components. One team on project design and site access. One team on implementation. One team on outreach and public education. Solar farm, wind turbines, hydro options. Could also look into how these things could benefit a traditional greening project.il.e. wind turbines on an urban farm.	

# APPENDIX B: CONTACTS

Level	Area	Organization	Description/Notes/Info	Contact
meso	Mon Valley	Mon Valley YMCA		Susan Capocciana, Assistant Director
meso	Mon Valley	Mon Valley Progress Council	Economic Development Org in Mon Valley - Part of Mon Valley Chamber of Commerce	jkirk@monvalleyprogress.org
meso	Mon Valley	The Mon Valley Initiative	Economic/Community Development Coalition (10 CDC's and Economic Development orgs)	Jo Ellen Welsh, Director of Community Outreach
meso	Mon Valley	Human Services Center Coproration	Working group on health - potential for collaboration on air quality stuff?	Dave Coplan, Executive Director
meso	Mon Valley	Steel Valley COG	Homestead, West Homestead	An Lewis
meso	Mon Valley	Mon Yough Area Chamber of Commerce	Business District stuff	Maury Burgwin
meso	Mon Valley	Twin Rivers COG	Duquesne and McKeesport	John Palyo
macro	Mon Valley	GASP	Clairton	Rachel Filippini Jamin Bogi
meso	Mon Valley	Three Rivers Community Foundation		Anne Lynch Manager of Administrative Operations and Special Projects
meso	Mon Valley	The Mon Valley Initiative	Mon Valley Micro Farms: rehab for resale program, aquire a property, renovate, sell	
meso	Mon Valley	Take Action mon Valley	Anti-gun, non violence group working for community awareness and cohesiveness around the mon valley	
micro	West homestead	Borough	Initial meeting produced several results. Follow up identified in West Homestead tab	Kyle Thauvette
meso	west Homestead	Allegheny County Council		Barbara Daly Danko
meso	McKeesport	McKeesport YMCA	YMCA Branch	412-672-9622
meso	McKeesport	Mon Valley - Allegheny Council Contact	Duquesne, McKeesport (District 9)	Bob Macey (412) 664-4112
meso	McKeesport	McKeesport Family Health Center	Community-based family programs and support	
meso	McKeesport	McKeesport Collaborative	(Affiliated with HSCC) Helps Women in Mon Valley with Substance Abuse - Housing	Arwen Davis, Operations and Special Projects Director
meso	McKeesport	McKeesport Housing Authority		Stephen Bucklew, Executive Dircetor
meso	McKeesport			
meso	McKeesport	McKeesport City	(AJ Tedesco (former councilmember) is full time Community Development Director	AJ Tedesco
micro	City of Clairton	City of Clairton		Richard Lattanzi-Mayor
micro	City of Clairton	City of Clairton		Deputy Mayor Kathy Tachoir
micro	City of Clairton	City of Clairton		City Councilman Richard Ford
meso	City of Clairton	Allegheny County Council		John Palmiere - Allegheny County Council District 6 (Clairton)
micro	City of Clairton	City of Clairton		Manager - Howard Bednar
micro	Duquesne	Borough Manager	Phone call	Frank Piccolino 412-469-0544
meso	Homestead	Western PA Conservancy	Green scan collaboration	Gavin Deming, GDeming@paconserve.org
meso	Homestead	Allegheny Togethers Program	Community based improvements to central business district	Contact through Town Center Associates
micro	Homestead	Borough	Borough Manager	Ian McMeans
macro	Mon Valley	GASP	works to improve air quality to ensure human, environmental, and economic health.	Rachel Filippini, rachel@gasp-pgh.org
meso	Mon Valley	The Breathe Project	coalition of residents, businesses, government and many other groups in sw PA - clean up air for the health of our families and economy.	
meso	Mon Valley	Residents for a Clean and Healthy Mon Valley (REACH)		
meso	Mon Valley	Mon Valley Clean Air Coalition	local citizens, environmental groups, and civic organizations - raise awareness of air quality issues and effect changes	contact@monvalleycleanair.org
meso	Mon Valley	Air Quality Partnership	encourage voluntary actions to reduce air pollution emissions, especially on "Action Days".	Sean Nolan
meso	Mon Valley	Sierra Club Allegheny Group		412-802-6161, Air Quality – Peri Unligil
meso	Mon Valley	Three Rivers Wet Weather	82 Allegheny County municipalities + City of Pittsburgh in addressing wet weather overflow problem. Work with Homestead and W Homestead	Program Manager Beth Dutton
meso	Mon Valley	Clean Water Action		
meso	Various boroughs	WPC	Green Scan recently done (soon to be completed) in Homestead	Gavin Deming, Community Specialist
macro	Mon Valley	Pennsylvania Environmental Council	Work in Water, Sustainable Communities, Energy & Climate, Rivertown Program, Green Infrastructure (for stormwater management)	

