

# Urban Survival: *Revitalizing Pittsburgh*

**Pittsburgh is a great American city.** Strategically located at the Forks of the Ohio, Pittsburgh was founded by the British in 1758. During two centuries of life, the wilderness outpost grew into the “Workshop of the World” and finally into the city we know today of 55 square miles populated by about 335,000 people. Pittsburgh is the 52nd largest city in the U.S. Over 2.36 million people live in the Greater Pittsburgh region, an area including Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties.

Throughout its history Pittsburgh has been known for its great natural beauty, resources, and industry. The hills — rich in coal, shale, sandstone, and limestone — were formed over 300 million years ago. Some 12,000 years ago, glacial action shoved the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers into their present courses. People have inhabited this region for thousands of years, but it is only in the last 240-plus years that the face of the landscape has significantly changed. Now bridges span the rivers and valleys, tunnels pierce the hills, and the towers of downtown stand higher than the hills.

Although Pittsburgh was founded in the eighteenth century, very little from that time remains, aside from the street plan of 1784. The Blockhouse of 1764 stands in Point State Park, and there are a few foundations of Fort Pitt nearby.

Of the nineteenth century prior to the Great Fire of 1845, there is only one building left for certain: the Greek Revival Burke’s Building of 1836, on Fourth Avenue, now the headquarters of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. A few simple buildings erected after the Fire remain in the 100 block of Market Street and in other places. Three tiny old houses of c. 1850 still cluster at Strawberry and Montour Ways. On Fort Pitt Boulevard, a handsome block of buildings from 1850 and after survives; these buildings give a human scale to the city as it rises in centuries beyond. Liberty Avenue has a large concentration of Victorian commercial architecture, too, and Penn Avenue is distinguished by a fine collection of early twentieth-century commercial buildings. Among the close-built streets are special places such as Mellon Square and Market Square, the “Diamond” of 1784 that was the only original public space.

The Golden Triangle — so named by the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1914 — once had a boatyard, foundries, and an assortment of rail lines with five stations. But zoning in 1923, the Renaissance in 1950, and two centuries of continuous urban growth and change have transformed the Triangle into a compact retail and white-collar business district.

And the work of building and rebuilding goes on.

This worksheet was produced by Landmarks’ Education Department, in cooperation with Anne-Marie Lubenau and Hilda Ertedgui.

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PITTSBURGH HISTORY & LANDMARKS FOUNDATION  
*Protecting the Places that Make Pittsburgh Home*

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## Quotable Quotes

Pittsburg [*sic*]...is without exception the blackest place which I ever saw....As regards scenery, it is beautifully situated, being just at the juncture of the two rivers, Monongahela and Allegheny....Nothing can be more picturesque than the site.”

—Anthony Trollope, 1860s

In 1868, James Parton, a travel writer for the *Atlantic Monthly*, described Pittsburgh as “hell with the lid off.”

Pittsburgh is a crazy-quilt place, the only place in this country where I can’t find my way around.

—Ernie Pyle, 1937

If Pittsburgh were situated somewhere in the heart of Europe, tourists would eagerly travel hundreds of miles out of their way to visit it.

—Brendan Gill, *The New Yorker*, January 9, 1989

Pittsburgh is a story of continuous building and rebuilding, of beginning anew, as is America; of long, often heartbreaking struggle, often tragic defeat, and of marvelous triumph, as is America; and constant improvisation, of constant human replenishment from every part of the world, as is America.

—David McCullough, September 13, 1990

Cities change, of course, but few so dramatically as Pittsburgh. For a place that just a few decades ago had an economy that virtually hinged on the steel industry, Pittsburgh methodically has shifted gears, changed directions and totally altered its economy as well as its skyline.

—*Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1990

Shaken by the collapse of the steel industry, which had provided them with an unshakable sense of identity for more than a century, Pittsburghers hunkered down and built a new economy based on services, medicine, education, and technology. In the process, they transformed their community from one driven by quantity of production into one devoted to quality of life.

—*National Geographic*, December 1991

**1753**

Twenty-one year-old George Washington identifies the land at the Point as an excellent location for a fort. He recommends to the British that they build a fort there.

**1754**

The French gain control of the Point and build Fort Duquesne.

**1758**

French soldiers burn and abandon their Fort at the Point. British General John Forbes claims the land and names the place "Pittsburgh," in honor of William Pitt, Prime Minister of Great Britain.

**1761**

The British complete Fort Pitt at the Point, and a frontier town begins to grow beyond the walls of the fort.

**1764**

Colonel John Campbell creates the first formal plan of streets beyond Fort Pitt. He lays out an area of four small blocks by the Monongahela.

**1784**

Working for the Penn family in Philadelphia, George Woods and Thomas Vickroy lay out the streets of the Triangle, from the Point up to present-day Ross Street.

**1797**

Isaac Craig and James O'Hara establish the first glass-making plant on the south shore of the Monongahela opposite the Point.



*The Woods-Vickroy plan of 1784*



*Pittsburgh in 1817*



*Pittsburgh c. 1890*



*Pittsburgh c. 1940*

**1911**

The U.S. Geographic Board of Names restores the "h" in the spelling of Pittsburgh.

**1936**

The Great St. Patrick's Day Flood nearly drowns the city. Flood waters crest at 46.4 feet above flood stage.

**1943**

Pittsburgh boasts record war time steel production.

**1946**

A city smoke-control law goes into effect. Democratic Mayor David Leo Lawrence and Republican philanthropist/financier Richard King Mellon work together to clean up and rebuild the city.

**Late 1950s**

Renaissance I is underway. In the years following, acres of buildings are razed in the Lower Hill, Central North Side, East Liberty, and Point for redevelopment projects.

**1964**

The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (Landmarks) is organized to help identify and save famous old buildings, neighborhoods, bridges, and sites.

**1970**

Three Rivers Stadium opens on the North Side.

*Frank Lloyd Wright's plan of 1946 for the Point, with a sports arena, opera house, convention hall, movies, winter garden, zoo, park, government offices, etc.*

**1812**

War spurs iron, rope, glass, and boat-building industries.

**1816**

Pittsburgh is incorporated as a city.

**1845**

The Great Fire burns 982 buildings in the city.

**1870**

The Monongahela Incline — the first of many passenger inclines — opens.

**1875**

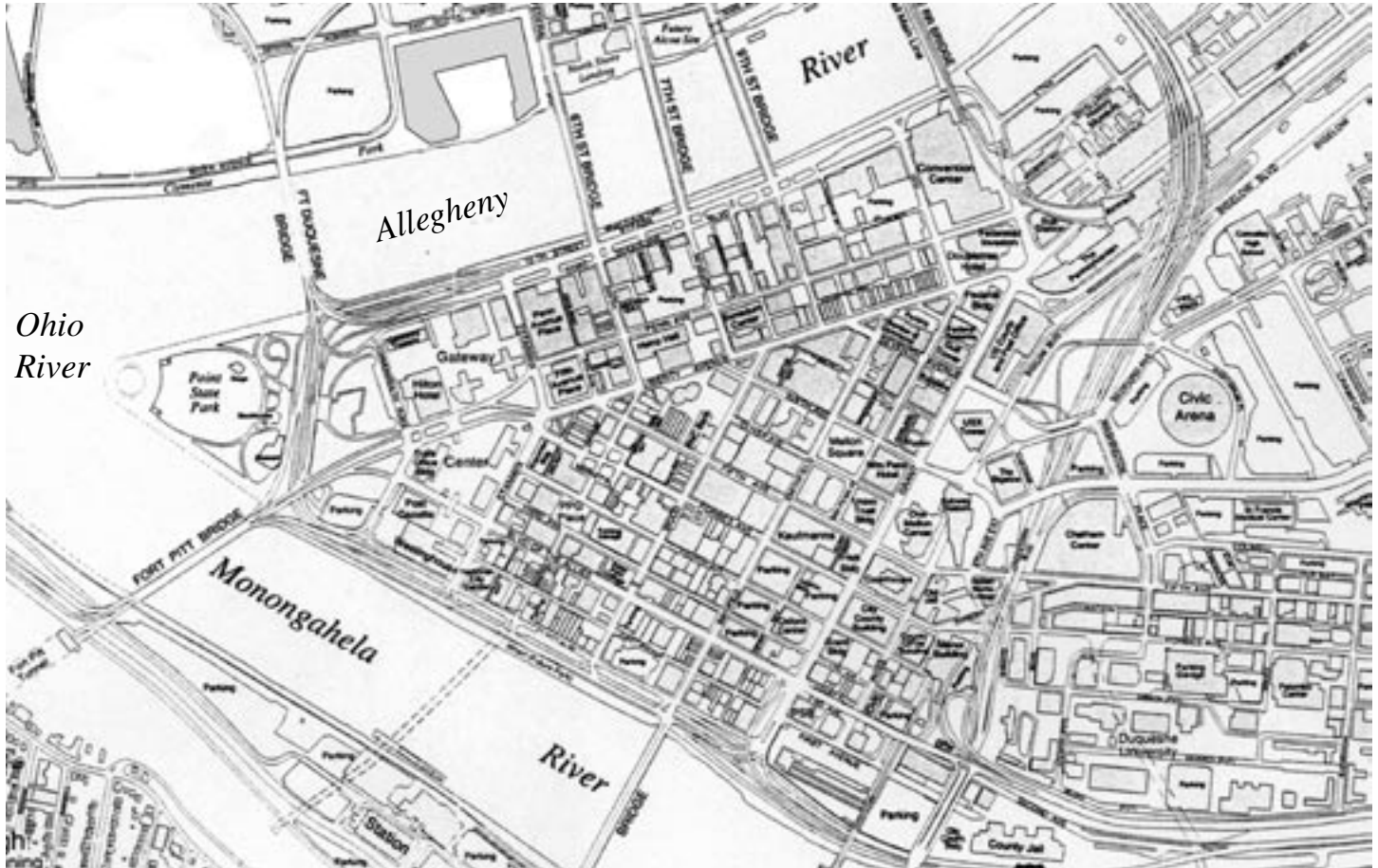
The “Age of Steel” begins. The first Bessemer steel in the Pittsburgh area is produced by Andrew Carnegie.

**1891**

The U.S. Board of Geographic Names announces that Pittsburgh must drop the “h” from its name.

**1907**

Allegheny City, on the north shore of the Allegheny River, is annexed to Pittsburgh, against the will of its citizens. Pittsburgh becomes the nation’s sixth largest city.



**1975**

City officials plan the David L. Lawrence Convention Center.

**1976**

Landmarks begins Station Square. Eventually, five old railroad buildings are saved and restored, and restaurants, shops, and offices open in them.

**1984**

PPG Place opens.

**1985**

Rand McNally names Pittsburgh the nation’s “Most Livable City.”

**1987**

The Cultural Trust renovates the Stanley Theatre as the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts and begins to encourage the revitalization of the Penn-Liberty Historic District.

**2000**

Landmarks rallies local and national support — and finally the City’s support — to create a revitalization plan for the Fifth-Forbes area with historic preservation as its key element.

**2001**

Three Rivers Stadium is imploded. PNC Park and a new Steelers Stadium open.

# The Planning Process

The Department of City Planning is organized to serve the needs of Pittsburgh's citizens by providing guidance and recommendations for the physical development and redevelopment of the City. Its goal is to ensure that development occurs in a manner that benefits the City, its inhabitants, and its visitors by planning ahead and promoting efficiency and equity through good design.

The Department of City Planning sets the framework for the City's physical development by preparing plans for public policy decisions on land use, infrastructure, and development. The Department manages that physical development through the policy and development review for the Planning Commission and through administration of the Zoning Ordinance.

Pittsburgh's built environment can help promote the health, safety, comfort, and welfare of its citizens. Regulation of the built environment occurs through the City's Zoning Ordinance, administered by the Land Use Controls Division of the Department of City Planning and enforced by the Bureau of Building Inspection, part of the Public Safety Department. Citizens or developers who wish to build or expand within the City are served by zoning staff who review development proposals. Proposals that require variances, conditional uses, or some other form of special review are also

examined by planning staff, who then make recommendations to either the Planning Commission or the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Zone changes approved by the Planning Commission must be approved by City Council.

The Department of City Planning is headed by the Planning Director, who reports to the Mayor. The Department provides staff support for the following

commissions and a board, whose members are appointed by the Mayor with City Council approval.

- *Planning Commission* is a nine-member panel charged with guiding land use and development within the City. The Commission makes recommendations concerning zoning ordinance and zoning map, reviews major development proposals, and prepares redevelopment plans.
- *Zoning Board of Adjustment* is a three-member panel that meets weekly to hear appeals to consider granting variances or special exceptions to the Zoning Code.
- *Historic Review Commission* protects and maintains historically and architecturally significant buildings and neighborhoods. The Commission is comprised of seven members and recommends buildings/districts that should be nominated for historic designation and administers designation and subsequent review process. Once a building/district receives a designation, the HRC has jurisdiction over all proposed new construction, demolition, and exterior work to the building.
- *Art Commission* is a nine-member panel that works to improve the aesthetic quality of the City's public spaces. The Commission is mandated to review all works of art in the City's ownership, as well as all urban design and architectural and landscape aspects of certain structures in which City funds are invested and which are erected on or above land belonging to the City or public spaces under the City's jurisdiction.

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*Grant Street, with One Mellon Bank Center, H.H. Richardson's Courthouse, and the City-County Building. The Mayor's office and Council Chambers are on the fifth floor of the City-County Building.*

*A detail from the City-County Building.*

