

The Planning Process

Department of City Planning
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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.

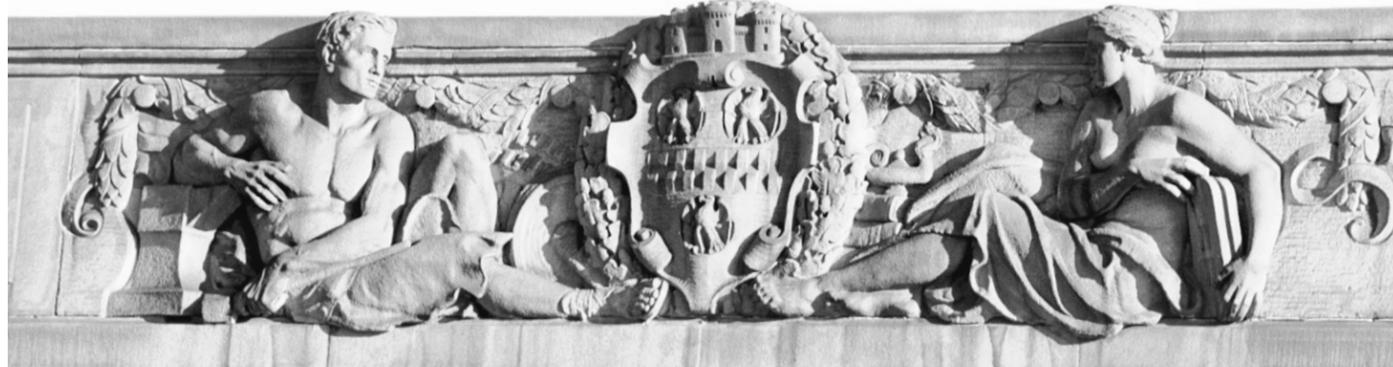
Pittsburgh's built environment can help promote the health, safety, comfort, and welfare of its citizens. Regulation of the built environment occurs through the City's Zoning Ordinance, administered by the Land Use Controls Division of the Department of City Planning and enforced by the Bureau of Building Inspection, part of the Public Safety Department.

Citizens or developers who wish to build or expand within the City are served by a zoning staff that reviews development proposals. Proposals that require variances, conditional uses, or some other form of special review are also examined by the planning staff, that then makes 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.



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 showing the Pittsburgh escutcheon based on the family coat of arms of William Pitt the Elder, the British statesman for whom Pittsburgh is named.



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 the zoning ordinance and zoning map, reviews major development proposals, and prepares redevelopment plans. It meets every other Tuesday (except during summer recess).
- *Zoning Board of Adjustment* is a three-member panel that meets every Thursday morning 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 the subsequent review process. Once a building/district receives a designation by City Council, the HRC has jurisdiction over all proposed new construction, demolition, and exterior work to the building. The HRC meets on the first Wednesday of every month.
- *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. The Commission meets once a month and the day varies.

Also Worth Knowing

Recommendations from the Historic Review Commission and Planning Commission are sent to City Council for final designation. City Council meets on the fifth floor of the City-County Building, on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings (10 am), except during summer recess.

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. The 18th-century wilderness outpost grew into the "Workshop of the World" in the 19th and 20th centuries and finally into the Renaissance city we know today of 55 square miles populated by about 316,000 people. Over 2.4 million people live in the Greater Pittsburgh region, an area including Allegheny, Armstrong, 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 200-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 18th 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 19th 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. 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 20th-century commercial buildings. Among the close-built streets are special places, places that invite pause or leave a vivid impression, such as Mellon Square, Katz Plaza, 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 over two centuries of continuous urban growth and change have transformed the Triangle into a compact district of businesses, government agencies, cultural and academic organizations, shops, restaurants, residences, and public spaces. About 2,800 people live in downtown Pittsburgh and 180,000 more come into the Triangle each work day. New development continues on the narrow slice of land and many historic buildings are being renovated and recycled for new uses.

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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 taken 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

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

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

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 British statesman William Pitt the Elder (1708-1778).

1761

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

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 River.

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.

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

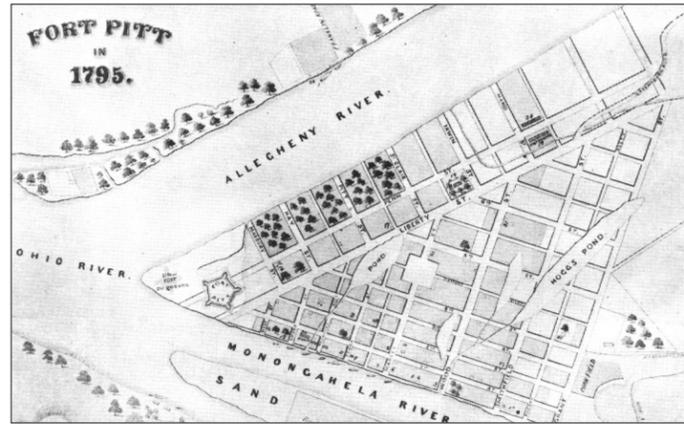
The "Age of Steel" begins. The first Bessemer steel in the Pittsburgh area is produced by Andrew Carnegie's steel company.

1891

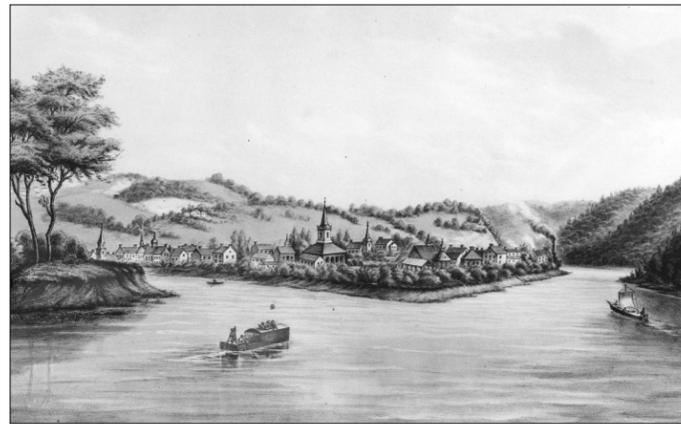
The U.S. Board on Geographic Names announces that Pittsburgh must drop the "h" from its name.

1907

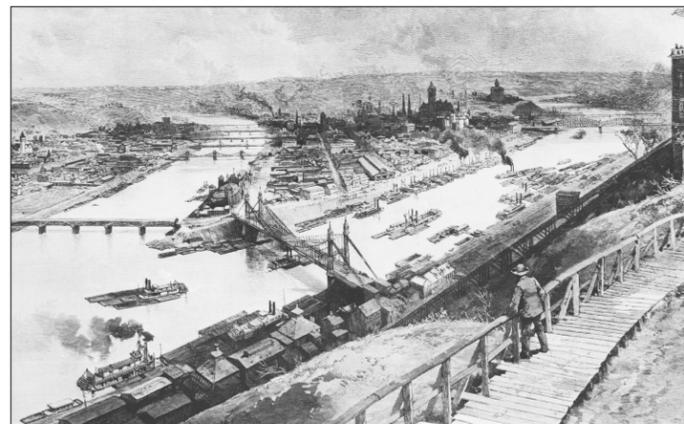
Allegheny City, on the north shore of the Allegheny River, is annexed to Pittsburgh, against the will of its citizens. Pittsburgh becomes the nation's sixth largest city.



The Woods-Vickroy plan of 1784



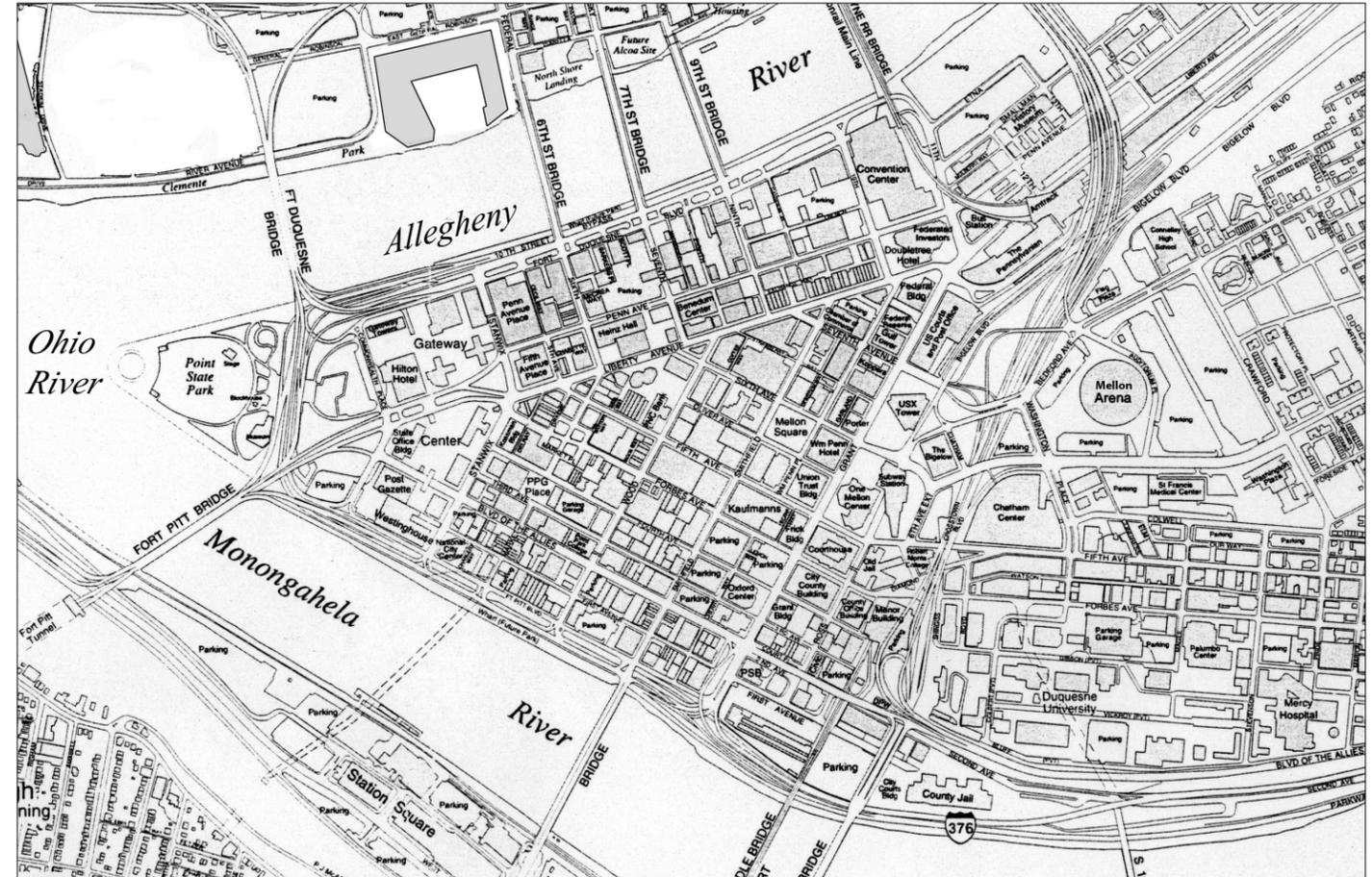
Pittsburgh in 1817



Pittsburgh c. 1890



Pittsburgh c. 1940



1911

The U.S. Board on Geographic 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 L. 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 identify and protect architectural landmarks, revitalize historic neighborhoods, and instill community pride.

1970

Three Rivers Stadium opens on the North Side. Both the Pittsburgh Steelers football team and Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team play there.

1976

Landmarks begins Station Square. Eventually, five historic railroad buildings are saved and adapted for new uses, and restaurants, shops, and offices open in them. Landmarks sells Station Square in 1994 to a private developer who continues developing the 52-acre riverfront site.

1984

PPG Place opens: designed by Philip Johnson (New York), the 40-story tower and five surrounding buildings are sheathed in reflective glass and capped by 231 pinnacles.

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 as part of Pittsburgh's "Cultural District." By 2007, the Cultural District attracts more than one million people a year, downtown.

2001

Three Rivers Stadium is imploded. PNC Park and Heinz Field open, for the Pirates and Steelers, respectively.

2003

The David L. Lawrence Convention Center, designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects, opens. It is the world's first "green" convention center.

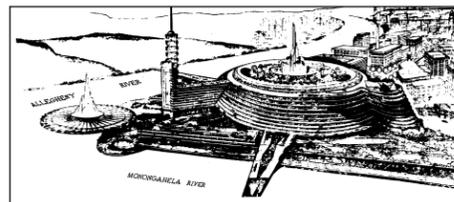
The nighttime view of Pittsburgh from Mt. Washington is named the "second most beautiful view in America." (USA Weekend Magazine)

2007

After attending the National Preservation Conference 2006, Arnold Berke, executive editor of *Preservation* magazine writes: "In postindustrial Pittsburgh, smoke did not get in our eyes, but an abundance of stunning architecture did. The density of fine buildings...could be tops in the nation."

2008

Pittsburgh celebrates its 250th birthday.



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.