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### **Successful Pittsburgh Neighborhoods**

Notwithstanding the unfortunate reality that the City of Pittsburgh as a whole continues to its decades long trend of population loss, there are neighborhoods in the City that have shown an ongoing ability to attract and retain residents. Famed Urbanist Jane Jacobs has argued that keeping people in the neighborhoods is a key element for healthy cities. Other theories suggest that communities attract and retain population by offering multiple opportunities for citizens to interact.

In a recent Allegheny Institute study by Professors Charlie Rubin and Michael Irwin of Duquesne University and Professor Irina Sharkova from Portland State University, several intriguing findings emerged with respect to the characteristics of Pittsburgh neighborhoods and the ability to retain and attract residents. Some of the important findings are discussed below.

Not surprisingly, the ability to keep residents is strongly correlated with the percentage of households who own their homes. Homeownership is an investment in both property and community. Those who own their homes are more likely to show concern for their nearby neighbors and their property. Thus, high percentage home ownership areas are likely to be comprised of people who look out for others, report suspicious behavior and generally create a zone of comfort for each other. Moreover, those who own homes are less likely to move after becoming attached to their homes and community.

Attracting new residents to a neighborhood is heavily influenced by a number of factors including the share of residents with college degrees and the presence of a mix of age groups, both young and older. New residents also seem to be attracted to neighborhoods that offer walkable blocks and public places such as parks, libraries, pools, schools, and recreation centers.

Three factors are found to be positively related to both “stayers” and new residents, namely: public places per 100 people; age mix of young and older residents; and street corner density (the number of intersections per 100 population). For the most part, new residents tend to concentrate in above income areas. Moreover, new residents tend to move to the downtown area, Oakland, Shadyside, and the Southside. The more remote areas of the City, south along the Monongahela and up the Allegheny, as well as Mt. Washington and the West End tend to get few new out-of-City residents.

The study’s authors offer several policy recommendations and caveats. Because of the importance of homeownership, the City should examine those factors that might discourage homeownership. There is also a caution against focusing on efforts to attract young professionals rather than promoting the presence of a good mix of younger and older residents. Young professionals just starting their careers are more likely to be footloose and move away than older

more settled residents. Thus, areas that have large concentrations of younger residents can be relatively undiversified and unstable compared to neighborhoods with a mix of both young and older residents.

The City's policy of building new stadiums, downtown retail developments and other amenities in an effort to attract and retain residents is misguided and probably counterproductive. Indeed, Pittsburgh's quality of life is already high and these taxpayer-financed projects only serve to increase the tax burden on local residents while doing little to bring in new residents. The high tax climate, poorly performing school district and inadequate infrastructure are not only keeping potential residents from locating in the City, they are also pushing current residents out.

If the administration wants to look for a successful plan for growth, it needs look no further than some of its own successful neighborhoods. These would be neighborhoods that have long promoted and encouraged businesses, provided incentives for homeowners, and offer community level gathering places. They offer walkable blocks and an environment in which residents feel connected and are often seen socializing with one another. This is the type of atmosphere that Jane Jacobs sees as vital to the success of any city. Pittsburgh should learn the lessons offered by its thriving neighborhoods and apply them to the City as a whole.

The full report can be accessed on our website at:  
[http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/reports/02\\_12.pdf](http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/reports/02_12.pdf).

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*Note: For a lively discussion of local issues be sure to listen this Monday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> to the Allegheny Institute Report at 7:30p.m. on 1410 KQV.*

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