

# C O L U M N S

JUNE, 2010

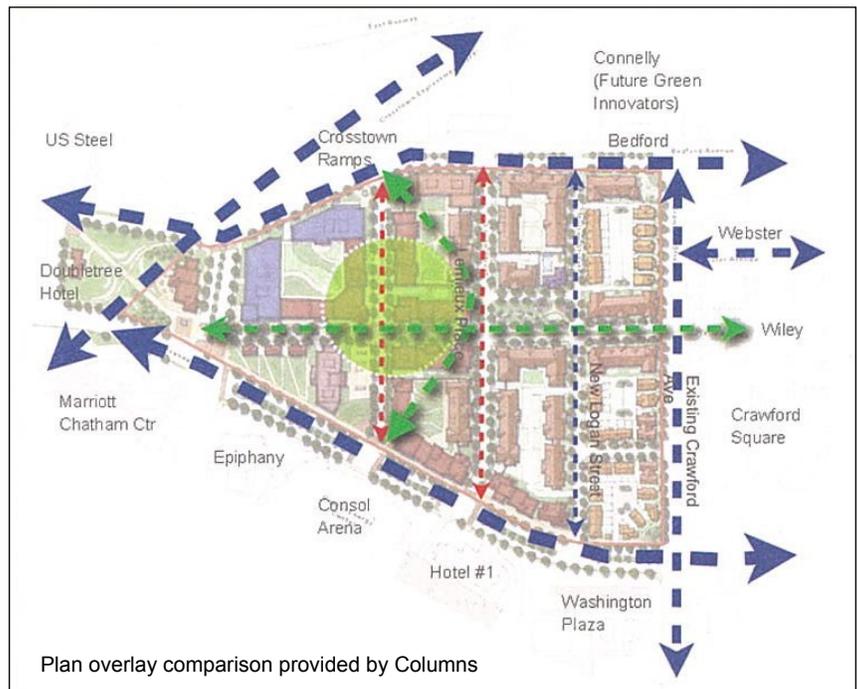
## The Case for Communication

By Kenneth Doyno

The clearing of the Lower Hill – along with similar ill-conceived redevelopment projects in the centers of East Liberty and the North Side – left a legacy of mistrust between classes and races which continues to hinder our region's social cohesion. It also created a culture of disbelief in our government's capacity to stand with the neighborhood interests rather than project-specific capital interests. This disbelief similarly hinders our growth and development. This is why it is heartening to hear our current leaders cite the clear voices of Hill District leaders when supporting the removal of the Civic Arena and the reconstruction of a neighborhood street grid.

Yet we know that a street grid does not ensure a community. In fact, what we have seen to date are discrete histories battling with periodic public pronouncements about the validity of their position. What we don't see is broad community dialog about the future state of the Lower Hill. I fear that without a continuum of such public dialog there is little prospect for a reconciled future being forged. Yet – for the very reasons stated above – it is this reconciled future that is essential to the Hill District, to our City, and to our region's future.

The first history I hear conflates historic urban form with social fabric. The 300 small businesses, thousands of residents, hundreds



of land interests, that squabbled, subdivided, rebuilt, and shaped the urban space and the people who lived there over one hundred years are gone. No street grid will ever bring this back.

The second history that I hear is the admiration of the crisp modern world of bold engineering – the brave new world (devoid of diversity and difference) hewn in a simplified singular geometric vision of perfection.

So what is the third history of the Lower Hill? Who will create this history? Who will invest in it? Who will own it? The ownership of development rights by the Penguins, coupled with the Hill

District community's decades-long effort to develop its leadership and voice provides a remarkable opportunity to align interests and seek reconciliation through a community based planning process. Based upon the latest salvos in the media, the demands of the community groups, and the quiet pursuit of the plan by the Penguins, I am fearful that we are heading for another planning clash that will reinforce the mistrust and increase the very divisions that need to be bridged in order for Pittsburgh to be a place of renewal, reinvestment, and growth.

Far more important than the

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Current street grid over 1923 grid provided by Columns

physical plan will be the social and economic reconciliation that can only come about through exchange and partnership. Regardless of how beautiful a plan may be, no one wants to invest in a social minefield. And no matter how strong the desire to bridge the economic differences of our region, no one will invest in property that loses money. These realities can be bridged but only through the creation of a shared and supported vision developed in the open light of the day. There will be dissent and disagreement, perhaps with plenty of messy vibrant open exchange, but why not? If that is what is necessary to establish broad community ownership, I think we can handle that.

1961 saw the inauguration of the Civic Area, the publication of The Death and Life of Great American Cities, the world population hit three billion, and Pittsburgh mark its first decade of population decline after 150 years of continuous growth. Half a century later the world population has doubled and our city's halved. I think it is safe to say, if we are smart enough, and work together, we are ready to grow again. Though I have been unable to find any materials that show the Penguin's vision for the site, I can imagine the economic sense and clear urban form of UDA's plan, I am stirred by the firm message of social justice emanating from the One Hill Coalition's Principles. I also admire Rob Pfaffmann's

physical reuse proposals. Mostly, I do not see these economic, social, and physical agendas as being particularly at odds with each other, just not effectively in conversation with each other. Personally, it does not matter to me if the future includes all, part, or none of the silver dome of the civic arena so long as the outcome belongs to all of the people that call this great city home. The vision for this site must be at peace with the community so it can open its arms to thousands upon thousands of more people of all race, class, and creed that will join us in creating our region's future.

Buildings and cities are for people; may it be so for Pittsburgh.