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**UP**

# Uptown Partners of Pittsburgh Community Engagement and Communications Plan

INFORMING, INVOLVING, AND INNOVATING  
WITH THE UPTOWN COMMUNITY FOR  
SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBORHOOD  
DEVELOPMENT

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*Source: Uptown Partners of Pittsburgh*

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# 1. Introduction

Source: Uptown EcolInnovation District Plan

As the only community organization within the formal boundaries of the Uptown EcolInnovation District (EID), Uptown Partners of Pittsburgh plays a crucial role in linking sustainable neighborhood development activities to Uptown’s community of residents, businesses, and institutions. This plan will outline Uptown Partners’ current means of communicating to and with the community about the Uptown EcolInnovation District planning process and other neighborhood planning and development events and provide suggestions for future practice.

The next section, [Existing Communications and Community Response](#), begins by presenting the current communications workplan executed by Uptown Partners staff. This section identifies the methods used to communicate to and with Uptown residents, businesses, and institutions by specifying which methods are used to reach which audiences, what messages are relayed to and sought from these audiences, and how often these communications are enacted. This section also presents an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Uptown Partners’ current communications workplan based on survey and interview research conducted with the Uptown community from June through August 2019.

The third section of this report, [Approaching Communications as Community Engagement](#), suggests a community engagement framework to guide the development of future communications with the Uptown community. This suggestion is based on the outcomes of the communications research pursued with the Uptown community as well as key lessons learned from case studies of communications practice in other neighborhoods pursuing sustainable development. This section describes a community engagement framework consistent with the City of Pittsburgh’s recently released *Public Engagement Guide* (City of Pittsburgh, 2019), and explores its connection to communication practice in Uptown.

The final section of this report, [Recommendations](#), maps out several ideas for future communications and engagement practice to inform, involve, and innovate with the Uptown community to achieve sustainable neighborhood development in Uptown. Because Uptown Partners is only one organization among many in the broader Uptown Task Force—and the Uptown community is likewise not the only audience relevant to EID communications—many of the recommendations in this plan will be subject to ongoing conversations about the capacities, responsibilities, and goals of the various organizations that collaboratively govern the EID. As such, this plan integrates governance considerations and discussion questions into each of its recommendations.

# 2. Existing Communications and Community Response

## 2A) Existing Communications Strategies

Uptown Partners currently uses a range of methods to communicate to and with the Uptown community about the EcoInnovation District planning process and other sustainable neighborhood development news and opportunities. These methods are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Current Uptown Partners Communications Workplan

OUTREACH METHOD	FREQUENCY/ STAFF PERSON	TARGET AUDIENCES	COMMUNICATION GOAL
Website	Event-by-event basis; Program Manager	Uptown residents, businesses, and institutions; other partners	<b>INFORM</b> about event and project updates, participation opportunities and neighborhood news via news articles.
Email Newsletter	Bi-monthly; Program Manager	Uptown residents, businesses, institutions; other partners	<b>INFORM</b> about event and project updates, participation opportunities, neighborhood news
Mailchimp E-Blasts	Event-by-event basis; Program Manager	Uptown residents, businesses, institutions	<b>INFORM</b> about event updates, participation opportunities, neighborhood news
Social media	Event-by-event basis; Program Manager	Uptown residents, businesses, institutions; other partners	<b>INFORM</b> about event updates, participation opportunities, neighborhood news
Fliers	Event-by-event basis; Program Manager	Uptown residents, businesses, institutions	<b>INFORM</b> about event updates, participation opportunities

<b>Door knocking</b>	Event-by-event basis; Program Manager	Uptown residents	<b>INCLUDE</b> in projects through soliciting feedback, <b>INFORM</b> about project and event updates/participation opportunities
<b>Community events and meetings</b>	Once a month per committee; Program Manager/UTF Subcommittee heads	Uptown residents, businesses, and institutions; other partners	<b>INCLUDE and INNOVATE</b> through participation/feedback opportunities, <b>INFORM</b> about project and event updates/participation opportunities

This table demonstrates that Uptown Partners currently uses a wide range of techniques to communicate with audiences in and beyond the Uptown community. Electronically, Uptown Partners makes use of website posts, a bi-monthly email newsletter, mail chimp e-blasts, and social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, and NextDoor. In-person techniques include fliers, door knocking, and community events and meetings. Meetings and community events are conducted in connection to not only Uptown Partners’ organizational committees, but in connection to the larger Uptown Task Force’s sub-committees as well. This represents one of many collaborations between Uptown Partners and the Uptown Task Force concerning EcoInnovation District communications and governance. The committee structure for both organizations is depicted in Figure 1 on the next page of this report.

Uptown Partners’ communications are jointly implemented by the Uptown Partners staff. Most communications techniques operate on an event-by-event basis. This reflects both the capacity of the Uptown Partners staff to conduct communications and the nature of neighborhood sustainable development, which constantly evolves and produces new needs for events and communications to be planned ongoingly and flexibly. As Uptown Partners is the neighborhood organization for Uptown, most of their communications focus on reaching neighborhood residents, businesses, and institutions. However, while these audiences are their main targets for relaying information, other audiences external to the Uptown community (i.e., funders, the Pittsburgh innovation community, the Pittsburgh non-profit and sustainable development community, etc.) also can and do access Uptown Partners’ electronic communications to stay informed about the neighborhood and its community development.

The different communications techniques employed by Uptown Partners reflect different goals sought via each technique. The strategies listed at the top of the chart, particularly the electronic communication techniques, primarily aim to **inform** audiences about neighborhood news and/or sustainable development projects and events in Uptown. This indicates that Uptown Partners seeks to convey information to audiences in one-way communication. Traveling down the chart towards the in-person communication techniques listed at the bottom, communication goals widen to include **involving** audiences (i.e., soliciting feedback, volunteerism, resources, etc.) in two-way communications, and further **innovating with** audiences in decision-making and problem-solving for the neighborhood through participatory engagement (i.e., public meeting attendance, agenda setting, etc.).

Figure 1. Committees of the Uptown Task Force and Uptown Partners

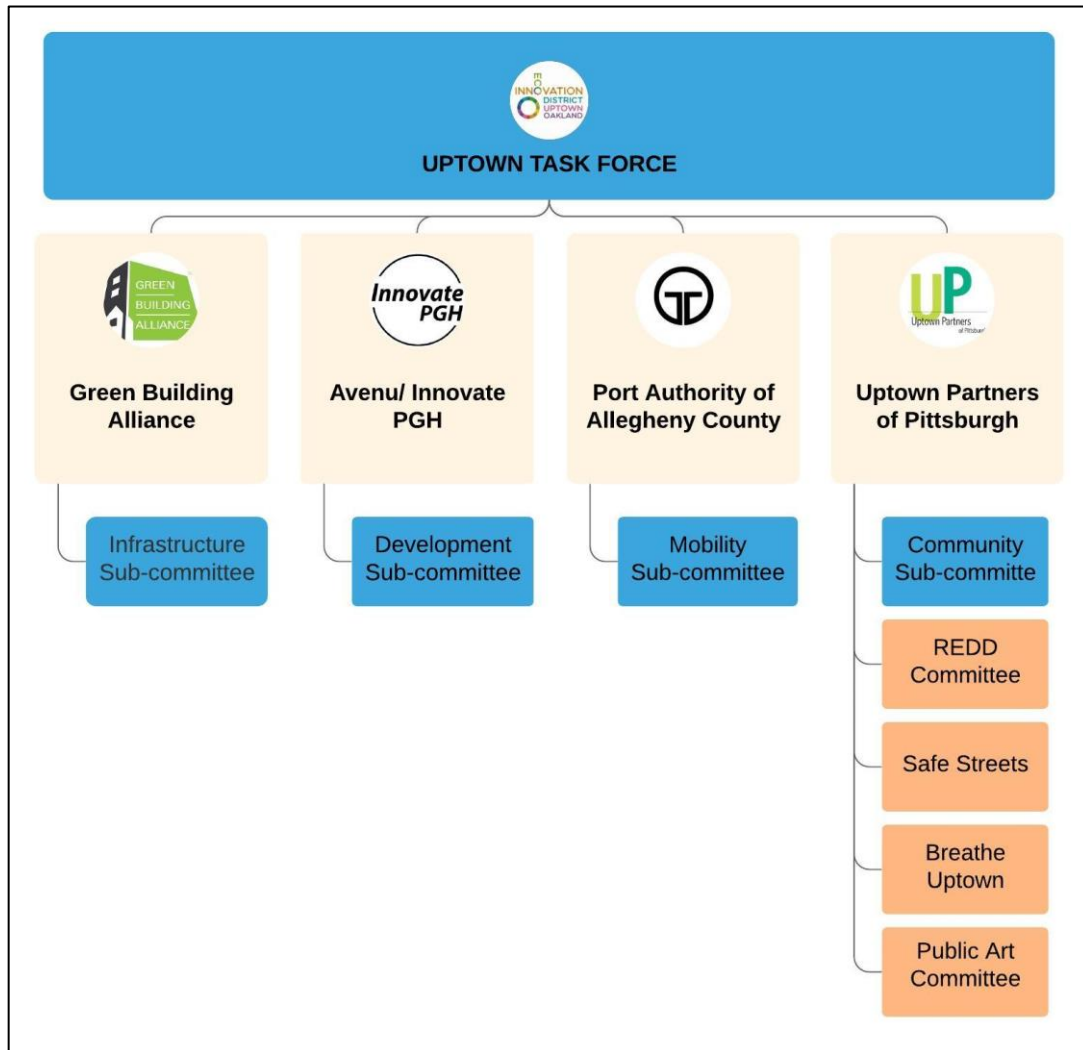


Figure 1: Uptown Partners is a member of the Uptown Task Force, the governance entity of the Uptown EcolInnovation District. The Uptown Task Force contains four sub-committees, each of which correspond to a section of the Uptown EcolInnovation District Plan. The Uptown Task Force and its subcommittees are depicted above in blue. In addition to leading the Community sub-committee for the Uptown Task Force, Uptown Partners also leads several internal committees depicted here in orange. Uptown Partners and other leading organizations of the Uptown Task Force are depicted in tan.

## 2B) Community Response to Existing Strategies

Research was conducted with Uptown residents, institutions, businesses, and ecoinnovation district planners from June through August 2019 to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Uptown Partners’ current communications strategies. This research included the following activities summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Communications Research**

RESEARCH METHOD	DETAIL
<b>Surveys of community members</b>	10 survey responses collected at Community subcommittee meetings; questions concerned strengths/weaknesses of Uptown Partners communications, barriers to/facilitators of community participation, level of knowledge about ecoinnovation district and projects
<b>Surveys of Uptown Ecoinnovation District planners</b>	2 survey responses collected from the Uptown Task Force subcommittee heads; questions concerned communications needs, challenges, and opportunities.
<b>Interviews with community members</b>	6 hour-long semi-structured interviews conducted with residents, businesses, and institutions. Questions concerned perceptions of the meaning of the ecoinnovation district, physical and operational changes in the neighborhood related to ecodistrict planning, and community awareness of/involvement in/communications about ecodistrict events and progress.
<b>Interviews with Uptown Ecoinnovation District planners</b>	4 hour-long semi-structured interviews conducted with members of the Uptown Task Force. Questions included the goals; governance processes; and communications needs, strengths, and weaknesses of the EcoInnovation District.

It should be noted that, while the existing research summarized above provides a useful basis for generating ideas about future EcoInnovation District communication strategies, it is not sufficient to be considered statistically representative of the views of the Uptown community. Participants in the research methods summarized above were recruited through a purposive “snowball” sampling technique that does not allow for a random, representative sample of

the Uptown community to have participated in this research. As such, future study into the community’s beliefs and desires regarding communications could supplement the existing work by taking the form of larger surveys that allow for more statistically representative data to be generated.

Research participants illuminated several strengths and weaknesses of Uptown Partners’ current communications workplan. These strengths and weaknesses are presented in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

**Table 3. Existing Communications Strengths**

<b>UPTOWN PARTNERS EXISTING COMMUNICATIONS STRENGTHS</b>	
<b>Successfully reaching a diverse neighborhood population</b>	Communication methods that already exist are reaching people; there is widespread support of the existing communications methods being used by Uptown Partners. Door knocking is particularly appreciated and required as not all Uptown residents have access to digital media. Door-knocking is an effective but time-intensive communication strategy for the Uptown Partners staff; this is an example of a resource challenges that Uptown Partners and the Uptown Task force will need to work through as part of their ongoing governance discussion (see final section of this report).
<b>Successfully enabling community-building</b>	Uptown Partners has a strong reputation for its successful community-building events. Diverse residents, businesses, and institutions attend and are recognized at these events. Family-oriented events accommodate parents as well as children; long-time and new residents have opportunities to meet; institutions and businesses from Uptown are featured in and contribute to events in ways that highlight their presence in the neighborhood.
<b>Strong neighborhood community fabric</b>	Uptown has a strong neighborhood fabric that amplifies and further extends Uptown Partners’ formal communications strategies. Word of mouth and close neighbor relationships are essential for the spread of community news in Uptown. Residents often share the word about events, opportunities, and resources with their neighbors or bring people in their neighborhood/building with them to community events. This is a valuable resource that Uptown Partners can further tap into in future communications.
<b>Opportunities for direct participation in neighborhood planning</b>	Many different committees and volunteer opportunities exist for members of the Uptown community to become involved in. With the exception of the Development Sub-Committee, all four Uptown Task Force sub-committees are open to the public and thus allow for the community to participate in structuring the work plans that guide EcolInnovation District activities. Likewise, the committees and events internal to Uptown Partners offer many different opportunities for residents to engage in neighborhood planning and direct its future course.



Table 4. Existing Communications Weaknesses and Opportunities for Growth

UPTOWN PARTNERS EXISTING COMMUNICATIONS WEAKNESSES/OPPORTUNITIES	
<b>Lack of central community space to bring diverse population together</b>	Uptown is a neighborhood comprised of block-level identities and zones. As a result, Uptown’s diverse population can at times also be fragmented. This tendency is exacerbated by the lack of central community meeting spaces (i.e., public plaza or park, coffee shop or community center, community library, etc.). The lack of a central meeting place is consistently cited as a barrier not only to becoming more informed about the community, but to sharing thoughts, ideas, and opportunities with other community members. As such, the lack of central spaces impedes the ability of community members to become involved in community meetings, events, and leadership roles in the EID planning process.
<b>Socio-economic barriers</b>	Uptown residents cited socioeconomic barriers to further participation in Uptown’s ecoinnovation district planning process. Limited time and money present a barrier to residents’ abilities to attend events and meetings even if they are adequately informed about them via Uptown Partners’ existing communication techniques.
<b>Culture of limited trust</b>	Even if Uptown residents are informed about meetings and events related to the EcoInnovation District, many resist involvement and participation due to Uptown’s historical legacy of being marginalized by development institutions and projects (e.g., urban renewal). By extension, residents express feelings of mistrust about the EcoInnovation District planning process, and express frustration about the burden of time and energy that requests of volunteerism place on them. Overall, historical and contemporary mistrust of institutions limits residents’ willingness to become involved in new planning processes even if these processes are equity-centered and well-intentioned.
<b>Technical and long-term nature of sustainable development process and projects</b>	The EcoInnovation District plan contains language that is more technical in nature than most community members find easy to translate into their everyday experiences living in Uptown. While previous community engagement research as part of the EID plan found that safety, community-serving retail, and affordability are central concerns of community members, the organization of the EID plan around the related but more abstract concepts of development, mobility, infrastructure, and community makes it challenging for community members to see their own immediate concerns and needs reflected in ecodistrict projects and priorities. Likewise, many ecodistrict projects operate on long-term timescales that preclude the easy recognition of small milestones or immediate benefits of planning effort. As such, many residents choose not to engage in the EID process because it appears disconnected to their interests and needs.

## 2C) Key Lessons about Existing and Future Communications

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Uptown Partners employs a diverse range of communication techniques to inform the community, involve the community, and innovate with the community on sustainable neighborhood development. A **key strength** of existing communications practice is that Uptown Partners and the Uptown Ecolnnovation District offer many opportunities for the Uptown community to not only become *informed* about sustainable neighborhood development, but to become *involved* in it and *innovate* on how to accomplish it through active participation in community events and committees. These opportunities hold great promise for the capacity of the Ecolnnovation District planning process to be open, inclusive, and democratically-driven.

This opportunity points to what is also a **key challenge** for Uptown that impacts but ultimately lays beyond communications concerning sustainable neighborhood development. While residents have many opportunities to engage in the planning process, many face personal and socio-economic barriers to doing so. When community members were asked about the challenges of **communications** about the Uptown Ecolnnovation District, they responded with information about challenges concerning their **engagement** in the neighborhood development process that are detailed in Table 4 above. Whereas communications challenges typically involve access to and legibility of information, the challenges listed in Table 4 include but go beyond such communication-based issues to encompass personal, socio-economic, cultural, and built environment barriers that make community members unable or unwilling to participate in community development activities even when they are aware of and understand such activities. This indicates that communications strategies alone are not enough to maintain and strengthen the role of the community in the Uptown Ecolnnovation District planning process going forward. Rather, it is important to view communications within the wider lens of community engagement as the Uptown Ecolnnovation District continues to develop.

The next section of this report lays out a framework for approaching communications as part of a spectrum of community engagement in the Ecolnnovation District planning process more broadly.

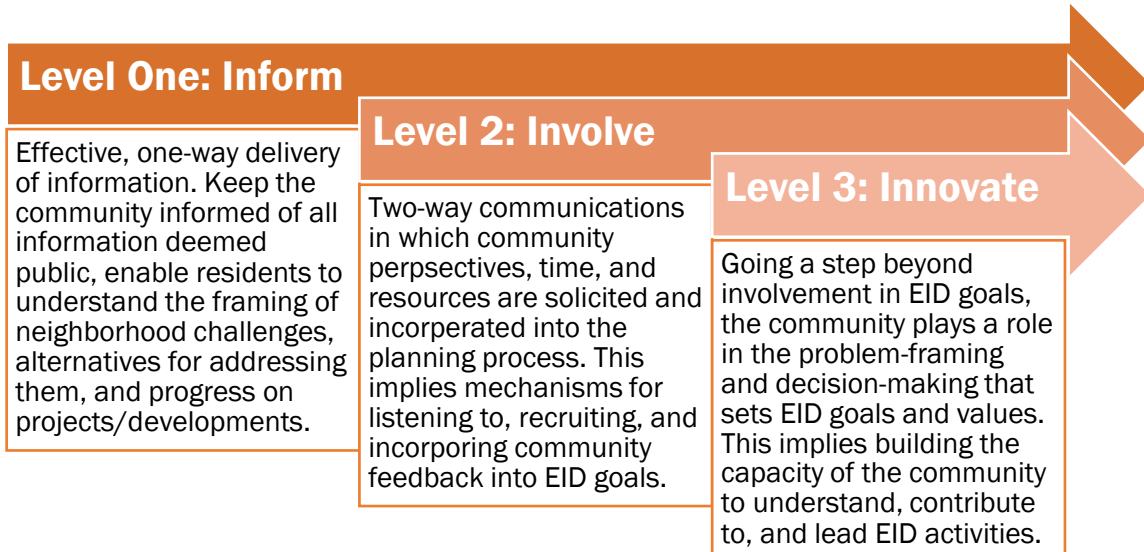


# 3. Approaching Communications as Community Engagement

## 3A) A Framework for Communications as Community Engagement

To conceptualize communications as part of a framework of community engagement means to consider one-way communication efforts to educate and inform the community about sustainable neighborhood development as one end of a spectrum that extends to include two-way communications such as soliciting community feedback and building community capacity to participate in neighborhood development. This spectrum can be broken into “levels” of community engagement that indicate an increasing degree of community involvement and empowerment in the neighborhood planning process. Figure 2 below illustrates three levels of communications/engagement that Uptown Partners enacts as a community organization and can seek to further develop as the Uptown Ecolnnovation District Planning process continues.

Figure 2. Three Levels of Community Engagement/Communication



As Figure 2 illustrates, this framework for conceptualizing communications in terms of community engagement identifies three levels of communications that each have a different goal and imply different roles for the planners and community members involved. The first level, titled **inform**, indicates the one-way delivery of information from planners to community members as the goal of communications. The community's role is to become educated about and understand community development processes and projects, but an active role for the community in those activities is not implied. At this level of communications, planners are responsible for presenting information to the community in a timely, accessible, and legible way to enable community members to learn and understand information that has been deemed public in nature.

The second level of communications in this framework, titled **involve**, indicates two-way flows of information, services, and resources between community members and planners. Community members are not only aware of community planning activities, but are involved in them via providing feedback on decisions and goals, volunteering their time in activities and events, and donating resources such as financial or other kinds of donations to help achieve project/event ends. In return, planners seeking to cultivate this level of engagement are responsible not only for informing the community of planning activities, but for listening to and incorporating the feedback, time, and resources of the community in the goals and values of neighborhood development.

Last, the **innovate** level of communications in this framework indicates that community members are not only aware of and involved in neighborhood sustainable development, but are empowered to play a leadership role in the problem-framing and decision-making activities that establish neighborhood development goals and activities. Community members at this level of communications/engagement have a voice in establishing the goals and activities of neighborhood planning, and planners are responsible for building and supporting both the community capacity (i.e., education, etc.) *and* institutional capacity (i.e., participation mechanisms, etc.) necessary to make this level of involvement possible and meaningful.

### **3B) Scholarly and Civic Context for the Proposed Framework**

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This framework of community engagement is consistent with many existing models. Notably, the City of Pittsburgh recently published its 2019 Public Engagement Guide, which specifies five tiers of community engagement that broadly correspond to the three levels proposed by this report. The City of Pittsburgh's (2019) public engagement framework and its relation to the model proposed in this report is illustrated in Figure 3 on the following page.

As in the current report, the City of Pittsburgh's public engagement framework indicates a spectrum of community involvement in neighborhood planning activities in which community members play increasingly empowered roles in decision-making and implementation of activities. This approach to conceptualizing community engagement is broadly consistent with the landmark scholarship on community engagement titled the "ladder of citizen participation" (Arnstein, 1969), which was the first intervention to suggest a nesting of levels

of participation in this manner. An assumption of this approach to community engagement is that planners maintain the knowledge, skills, and power to both decide what level of community engagement is desirable and appropriate in a given situation, and solicit that level of engagement from the community. Another assumption underlying this model of community engagement is that more participation by and engagement of the community is inherently good, leading to a better planning process and outcomes.

**Figure 3. City of Pittsburgh 2019 Public Engagement Framework**

		INCREASING IMPACT ON DECISION 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC		We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

*Figure 3: The City of Pittsburgh’s (2019) Public Engagement Framework provides a basis for the community engagement framework proposed in this report. The “inform” level of this report corresponds to the “inform” level of the City of Pittsburgh’s framework. Likewise, the “involve” level of this report corresponds to the “consult” and “involve” levels of the City of Pittsburgh’s framework, and the “innovate” level of this report corresponds to the City of Pittsburgh’s “collaborate” and “empower” levels.*

Source: *The City of Pittsburgh 2019 Public Engagement Guide, Page 30*

While the “ladder of citizen participation” approach continues to exercise a significant influence on community planning practice, more recent scholarship on community involvement in neighborhood governance casts a more nuanced view on the assumptions that guide the “ladder” framework. In particular, this work highlights that the tendency to cast notions of “community” and “community engagement” in an exclusively positive light can serve to mask the local politics inherent in which actors have what kinds of power to participate—or not—in what kinds of planning activities. For instance, while increasing community participation is generally considered a good thing for the planning process, if that increase in engagement reflects an increased burden on community members to participate in neighborhood upkeep without an associated increase in their capacity and power to guide development priorities and say “no” to activities in which they do not prefer to participate, what appears to be an increase in democratic community engagement may in fact be the neoliberal devolution of responsibility from the state to community members (DeFillipis, Fisher, and Shragge, 2010).

As such, given that neighborhood development and community engagement are inherently political processes, it is important to pay attention not only to “levels” of community engagement deemed appropriate and desirable in a given planning situation, but the underlying values that will guide community engagement processes and be reinforced by them. The City of Pittsburgh’s 2019 Public Engagement Guide again provides a basis for establishing guiding values for community engagement, highlighting the following items as essential principles of community engagement (Page 35). These principles should be sought after regardless of the “level” of community engagement in a given project. Achieving and monitoring success along the lines of these principles requires attentiveness to the local politics, histories, and networks involved in neighborhood sustainable development.

**Table 5. City of Pittsburgh Public Engagement Principles**

Principle	Explanation
<b>Transparency and open communication</b>	Legitimate processes and credibility are built through transparency and open communication with all stakeholders.
<b>Build a foundation of trust</b>	Reconcile historic inequities to build a new foundation based on trust.
<b>Center equity and fairness</b>	Acknowledge systematic issues and make intentional efforts to address equity considerations in any engagement process.
<b>Value relationships</b>	Human relationships with the community foster respect and increase engagement from representative community groups and residents. Project leads should value those relationships in any process
<b>Maximize participation</b>	Well-designed engagement processes maximize participation of residents and stakeholders.

### 3C) Lessons from Case Studies

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Given the complexity associated with enacting community engagement strategies, it is helpful to examine case studies of community engagement to distill lessons for how to achieve the fulfillment of community engagement principles on the ground. The following three case studies demonstrate that community ownership, centralized and consistent messaging/branding, and centralized resource support are key to fostering and maintaining community engagement in a sustainable neighborhood development process.

#### Case Study 1: Towerside, Twin Cities, MN



Source: Towerside Innovation District

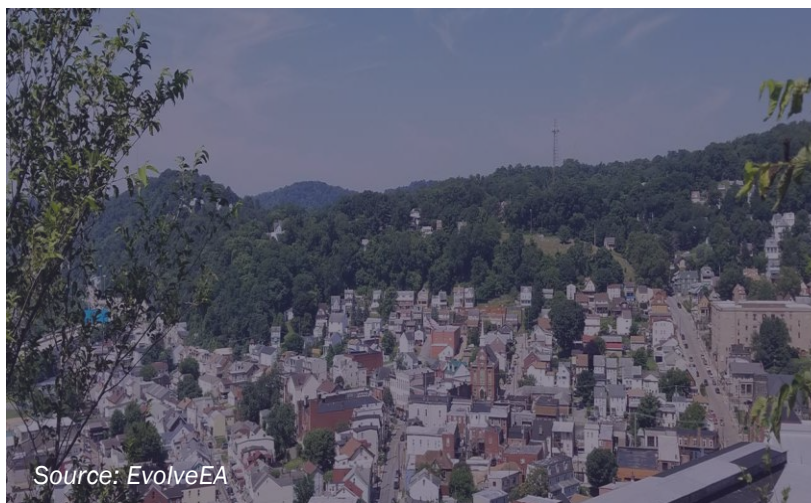
The Towerside Innovation District has much in common with the Uptown EcoInnovation District. Both sites lay between rapidly growing commercial districts, and both governance teams seek to activate the space in-between through infrastructural innovations that spark a renewed sense of local identity and innovation. Towerside communications are centralized and consistent: there is a single website, Facebook, and Instagram account under the

Towerside name, and the information in these sources is consistent across platforms and translated into easily understood everyday language. This could provide useful guidance for the Uptown EcoInnovation District, as Uptown's ecodistrict activities are promoted through web platforms that reflect individual Uptown Task Force organizational identities versus a single coherent organizational/neighborhood identity. The Uptown EcoInnovation District website presently offers direct access to the neighborhood plan, but offers less translation of plan goals and strategies into everyday language. Towerside is managed by a central staff person and a broader board of advisors, enabling a diverse range of viewpoints to be centralized in a governance framework and translated into a central, consistent messaging campaign.

#### Case Study 2: The Millvale Ecodistrict, Pittsburgh, PA

Millvale is in many ways a different type of ecodistrict from Uptown. Millvale is a borough of Pittsburgh rather than one of its city neighborhoods, and Millvale is characterized by much smaller institutions than those involved in governing the Uptown EcoInnovation District. While these differences are cogent, Millvale is a useful case study for the Uptown EcoInnovation District to consider in regard to communications and community engagement because

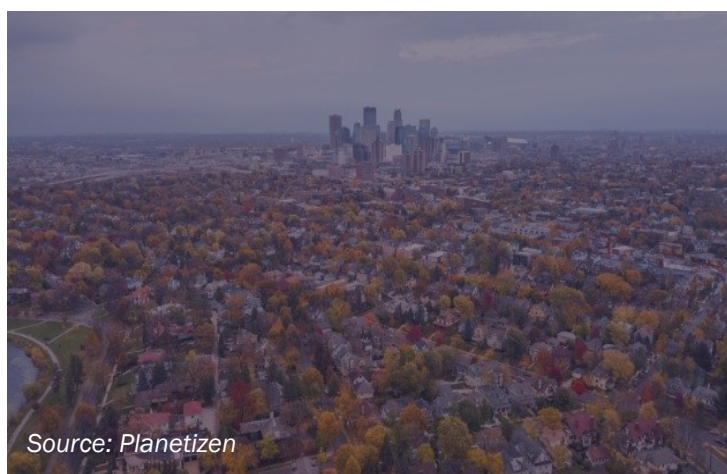
Millvale’s institutional and geographic context render its success as an ecodistrict highly dependent upon successful community engagement. Millvale has demonstrated that fostering community ownership is key to its ecodistrict success. The Millvale and TriBoro Ecodistrict teams employ several strategies to encourage a strong sense of



Source: EvolveEA

community ownership around ecodistrict activities. These include year-long educational campaigns in each community that culminate in the development of “community champions” who further organize events and activities; the development of central community spaces (i.e., community libraries and gardens) in each community to serve as sites for community-building, resource-sharing, and ecodistrict governance; and explicit connections between ecodistrict plans and the everyday life concerns and experiences of community residents (i.e., plans are organized by quality of life concerns such as water, air, food, etc.). Collectively, these techniques foster community ownership of the problems identified in the Ecodistrict plans and investment in contributing to the solutions.

### Case Study 3: Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, Minneapolis, MN



Source: Planetizen

While not an ecodistrict, the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization program (NRP) in many ways parallels the context and goals of Pittsburgh and its ecodistricts. Developed in the late 1980s, the NRP is a neighborhood empowerment and planning program in which neighborhood-based organizations create neighborhood action plans and are funded by the City of Minneapolis to help implement them (City of Minneapolis,

2019). The centralized resource support offered to neighborhood groups via this structure makes the NRP the “most financially empowered structure of neighborhood governance in any American city” (Fagotto et. Al., 2006). This is cited as an essential part of the success of Minneapolis’ district-scale neighborhood revitalization effort.





## 4. Recommendations

Using the “Inform, Involve, Innovate” Community Engagement Framework presented in the prior section, this final section of the report presents suggestions for the further development of each level of communications/engagement in the ongoing implementation of the Uptown EcolInnovation District planning process. For each level of communications/engagement, this report will A) illustrate how Uptown Partners’ existing activities correspond to this level and B) provide recommendations for further enhancing EcolInnovation District communications and engagement at this level.

The recommendations provided in this section reflect the existing communications activities that Uptown Partners has pursued; however, the implementation of these recommendations likely exceeds the capacity or responsibility of any single organization in the Uptown Task Force as it is currently organized. Ongoing conversations about the governance of the Uptown Task Force will be central to and inseparable from related conversations about the desired, appropriate, and possible role of the community in the future of sustainable neighborhood development in Uptown. Like the other various community organizations, governmental entities, and private institutions engaged in governing the Uptown EcolInnovation District via their involvement in the Uptown Task Force, the Uptown community is an essential and complex actor in the neighborhood’s ongoing sustainable development. Just as the roles of the other actors continue to evolve and change throughout the institutionalization of the Uptown Task Force, the responsibility, capacity, and power of the Uptown community in the EcolInnovation District planning process is inevitably tied to and reflective of the governance structure of the neighborhood’s community planning effort. Given these close connections between the opportunities and challenges of communications, engagement, and governance in the EcolInnovation District, this section of the report also proposes discussion questions for the Uptown Task Force to consider including in their ongoing conversations about how best to govern sustainable neighborhood development in Uptown. The challenge of integrating community engagement into efficient, effective, and long-term planning projects is an enduring challenge of community planning, and in this as in other areas of neighborhood development the Uptown EcolInnovation District has the potential to serve as an innovative and influential experiment on behalf of other Pittsburgh city neighborhoods and the international network of ecodistrict communities more broadly.

## 4A) “Inform” Recommendations

### Existing Practices and Challenges

Many of the existing Uptown Partners communications strategies (i.e., bi-monthly newsletter, website posts, social media posts, door-knocking, fliers, community meetings and events) provide a strong foundation for the “inform” level of communication/engagement.

Challenges associated with this level of communications are typically focused around the ability of residents, businesses, and institutions to A) access and B) understand information being communicated. In Uptown, research has shown that a lack of public spaces, limited staff capacity/organizational funds, and the technical/long-term nature of Ecolnnovation District projects are particularly relevant to these challenges. As such, future efforts at this level of communications can focus on enhancing the accessibility and legibility of information by addressing these challenges.

**Table 6. “Inform” Recommended Strategies**

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION	DETAIL
Accessibility of information	<b>Create more centralized spaces for sharing information</b>	Tap into Uptown’s strong neighborhood fabric by creating more centralized spaces for community members to find information. For example, establish public locations for posting fliers, and work with businesses/institutions to print the bi-monthly newsletter for hard-copy access to patrons. Consider including the creation of public information kiosks as a community benefit that developers can provide in the Uptown Ecolnnovation District Development Guidelines.
	<b>Enhance direct access of residents to communications materials</b>	For community members who are less mobile outside their homes, enhance the direct access of residents to informational materials via strategies like working with multi-unit apartment building owners to post fliers, pursuing opportunities to create door-hangers with local institutions, and using non-profit community organization status to do bulk mailings of informational materials to residents in Uptown.
	<b>Support creation of community news publication</b>	Uptown does not currently have a single, central news publication about neighborhood events, news, and opportunities for involvement. Work with local news institutions (e.g., Public Source, which is located in Uptown), to initiate a community magazine that residents can trust as a go-to source of neighborhood information.

Legibility of Information	<b>Centralize electronic communication platforms across UTF institutions</b>	EcolInnovation District news is currently communicated not only via Uptown Partner’s web platforms, but through the websites and in the voices of many of the Uptown Task Force institutions. Enhance the clarity of EcolInnovation District communications by creating a central website, social media platforms, and newsletter for the EcolInnovation District as a whole (i.e., Twitter handle, website name, and newsletter branding reflect the EID as a whole vs. single or groups of specific organizations of the Uptown Task Force.)
	<b>Use a common language to brand and explain EcolInnovation District activities across UTF institutions</b>	In addition to making the web-based platforms centralized across the Uptown Task Force institutions, develop clear and consistent branding and language about the EcolInnovation District to be utilized by all members of the Uptown Task Force when discussing the EcolInnovation District. A branding and style guide will enable consistent branding and messaging and lead to less confusion about details such as the specific name of the ecodistrict, its definition, and how the aspects of the plan and its implementation are explained and presented.
	<b>Link language to everyday concerns and experiences of the Uptown community</b>	In addition to using a consistent language and branding across Uptown Task Force institutions to discuss the EcolInnovation District, link the language of EcolInnovation district communications to community interests and concerns about affordability, community-serving retail, safety, and other priorities expressed by the community.

## 4B) “Involve” Recommendations

### Existing Practices and Challenges

Uptown Partners has a strong foundation for this level of communications/engagement via their successful history of organizing community events for the neighborhood. These events are direct ways of recognizing and giving back to the community, not only in terms of providing food and giveaways but in terms of providing space and time for connection in the neighborhood. This, in turn, helps facilitate feelings of connection, recognition, and pride in community that motivate people to continue giving their time and other resources to EcolInnovation District planning efforts.

Challenges associated with this level of engagement are centered on Uptown community members' feelings of frustration over, over-extension due to, or disconnection from opportunities to/requests for sharing their feedback, time as volunteers, and resources through donations. These challenges can be addressed by making requests for community members feedback, time, and resources more strategic, and enhancing the recognition that community members receive for their involvement with the EcoInnovation District planning process.

**Table 7. “Involve” Recommended Strategies**

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION	DETAIL
Community fatigue about requests for feedback	<b>Make requests more strategically</b>	Align requests for community feedback with the existing data collection activities of the Uptown task Force subcommittee heads. Develop and incorporate qualitative measures of community interest, satisfaction, needs, and/or desires into the existing indicators of success being developed and pursued by each subcommittee, and consistently ask the community to respond to questions or prompts that address these strategic feedback points at meetings and events at varying points throughout projects.
	<b>Enhance recognition</b>	To encourage community members to provide feedback, demonstrate to the community that their feedback is valued and utilized. Publicize the collection and utilization of community feedback through activities like: including short articles on how community feedback is being used in newsletters, creating a public database of community feedback hosted on the EcoInnovation District website, incorporating an electronic “suggestion box” area in the EcoInnovation District website, etc.
Community fatigue about requests for volunteering time	<b>Make requests more strategically</b>	Establish more formal partnerships with community institutions and businesses such that regular volunteer opportunities are observed throughout the year and attended by volunteers whose interests and availabilities align with these events. For example, work with the Duquesne University student commuter council to establish regular community service days that contribute to their need to conduct given numbers of hours of service for their academic programs. Even outside of such partnerships, planning regular community service opportunities

		well in advance can increase the likelihood that people will be able to plan to attend.
	<b>Enhance recognition</b>	A rewarded volunteer program can help enable the Uptown Task Force/Uptown Partners to recognize volunteers with financial or donated gifts on a limited budget. For example, friendly block-level competitions for volunteer hours can result in a block party for the winning street. On an individual basis, accumulating a given number of volunteer hours in a set period of time can lead to rewards such as gift cards to local Uptown businesses.
<b>Community fatigue about requests for donations/ financial support</b>	<b>Make requests more strategically</b>	Establishing a strategic fund-raising plan that includes items/events such as a holiday wish-list, neighborhood giving week, or Uptown appreciation day can offer opportunities for Uptown Partners/The Uptown Task Force to strategically seek financial support and/or donations that can be used for community events on a regular basis.
	<b>Enhance recognition</b>	Uptown Partners already recognizes community institutions who support their work at events, meetings, and in their publications. Enhance this with publicizing the results of specific fund-raising campaigns, and send personal post-cards along with information about Uptown’s sustainable development progress to donors on a quarterly/yearly basis.

### 4C) “Innovate” Recommendations

#### Existing Practices and Challenges

The Uptown EcoInnovation District Subcommittees and the Uptown Partners committees offer many opportunities for residents to have a voice in problem-framing, decision-making, and goal-setting for Uptown’s sustainable development.

Even when community members are aware of these opportunities, however, socio-economic limitations and a culture of limited trust have been revealed as barriers to the community taking on leadership roles in the EcoInnovation District planning process. To address this challenge, future communication/engagement strategies can focus on building the capacity of the community to participate trustfully through investing in residents’ skills and economic security. These actions fall in line with the principle of addressing historical legacies of mistrust to re-build collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships between planners and community members.

**Table 8. “Innovate” Recommended Strategies**

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION	DETAIL
<p><b>Mistrust and socioeconomic limitations presenting barriers to participation and leadership</b></p>	<p><b>Develop community engagement programs that provide participants with job development and community organizing skills</b></p>	<p>Following the example of programs like the County Cooperative Extension “Master Gardener” program, develop a by-application skills training workshop that culminates in residents receiving a certificate of completion. Training programs can be focused on community development skills to enhance the capacity of the Uptown community to self-organize according to their needs and desires, potentially supporting Uptown Partners by no longer rendering them the only community group in the neighborhood. Participation in the program should be free of charge, or scholarships should be made available to Uptown community members to attend. Graduates of the program should be required to lead a community project and/or complete a given number of volunteer hours in the community. As a step towards this long-term goal, perhaps incentive can be provided for Uptown community members to participate in the City of Pittsburgh’s existing community development skills workshop program.</p>
	<p><b>Develop community engagement programs that are centered on youth</b></p>	<p>Community engagement programs that focus on youth build the capacity of the community to participate in neighborhood planning over a long-term time period. Investing in the community’s children helps draw connections between planners and families, and can relieve families of burden by having youth-centered engagement programs double as opportunities for low-cost and high-quality childcare.</p>

**4D) Uptown EcoInnovation District Governance Considerations**

The recommendations provided in this report are closely tied to as-yet unresolved questions about the responsibilities, capacities, and accountabilities of the existing Uptown Task Force member organizations in governing the EcoInnovation District. To assist in tying communication- and engagement-related challenges and opportunities to the broader governance conversations being pursued by the Uptown Task Force, the following chart lists discussion questions for consideration by the Uptown Task Force. These considerations only increase in importance when a broader range of audiences relevant to the EcoInnovation District’s ongoing implementation (i.e., potential funders, potential partners, regional news audiences, the regional innovation community, etc.) are considered along with the Uptown

residents, institutions, and businesses that have been the primary scope of focus in this report.

**Table 9. Governance-Communications-Engagement Discussion Questions**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	
<b>General questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What ecoinnovation district projects call for which levels of engagement? Who has the authority to be part of this decision, and how should it be made?</li> <li>• What audiences outside the Uptown community are important to the work of the Ecoinnovation district?</li> <li>• How should the ecoinnovation district be branded/explained in coordinated messaging, both to the community and to external audiences?</li> <li>• What internal communication barriers/strengths are present in the Uptown Task Force?</li> </ul>
<b>“Inform” level questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information about the ecoinnovation district is public? What must be communicated, what should be communicated, and what is considered private?</li> <li>• Who is the face of communications for the ecoinnovation district, i.e., who should host the website, social media, etc. on behalf of the Task Force? Alternatively, how can these platforms be hosted such that no single organization is identified as the lead or primary organization?</li> <li>• Who has the capacity/resources to convey information to the Uptown community and other audiences? How can resource gaps be collectively filled?</li> </ul>
<b>“Involve” level questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is publicly accountable to the public for responding to community feedback?</li> <li>• At what point in development projects, infrastructure projects, etc. will the community feedback be sought/how will this be institutionalized? Where does this fit into existing processes (i.e., RCO meetings, etc.)?</li> <li>• What feedback is useful from the community? What qualitative indicators are useful for tracking progress?</li> <li>• Who has the capacity/resources to coordinate programs geared towards volunteer/fundraising efforts? How can resource gaps be collectively filled?</li> </ul>
<b>“Innovate” level questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will dissenting opinions and diverse viewpoints be included in and responded to via the community planning process?</li> <li>• How has the capacity/resources to invest in the Uptown community via skill-building programs and community development/workforce development programs? How can resource gaps be collectively filled?</li> </ul>

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