

Pittsburg, KS

Pittsburg is the commercial and cultural hub of a group of traditional mining towns in southeastern Kansas. On top of its base population of roughly 20,000 people, Pittsburg State University adds another 7,500 students to the city when in session and since the university offers in-state tuition to neighboring states, it attracts a diverse student population. Pittsburg has low unemployment, but residents report low wages for the same jobs found in other markets. The city has struggled to attract and retain high-level talent and knowledge-economy jobs.

Pittsburg currently has a wealth of economic opportunities before it:

- In the last three years the city has seen roughly \$260 million in combined capital investment associated with the university, the medical sector, its major employers and public infrastructure.
- The city is currently growing, with new subdivisions coming online to accommodate an expected 1,200 new residents per year through 2018.
- Early 20th century prosperity left the city with an inheritance of historically significant buildings, most of which are located in the downtown city grid.
- Pittsburg also has a significant amount of developable land. In particular, adjacent to downtown is a 350-acre brownfield site that was once the operating location of a Dickey Clay pipe manufacturing plant. Years of smelting have left the site contaminated with heavy metals and it will require environmental remediation and removal of the existing structures. If that were done, however, the site holds valuable potential for new development.

Pittsburg sought assistance in considering development plans for the Dickey Clay site. City officials have begun a planning process for the brownfield, with some preliminary plans already in consideration. Smart Growth America's Smart Growth 101 toolkit was requested as a means to guide the city's ongoing planning toward a sustainable model. Smart Growth America also performed a Fiscal Impact Analysis pursuant to a grant by USDA Rural Development, which will assist Pittsburg in taking inventory of the infrastructure cost of potential development patterns.

Actions for success:

- Completion of the Colonial Fox Theater restoration
- More art walks or similar community gatherings
- Locating a grocery store in downtown
- More students living in downtown
- A sustainable solution for downtown property maintenance
- Better amenities for boomers in their second adulthood
- Bike trails running through the warehouse district
- A Dickey Clay development plan that speaks to Pittsburg's identity
- Better connectivity for university, public bus routes

Obstacles:

- Poor property maintenance among some downtown building owners
- A sense that Pittsburg State University dominates the city's identity
- Poorly defined boundaries of responsibility between the city and private owners
- Low buy-in outside of the core change agents

- A reputation as a sleepy city that lacks nightlife or a magnetizing culture

Opportunities:

- Washington School building in the “warehouse district”
- Block 22 initiative
- Carless, international student population would thrive downtown
- “Otherworldly” structures of the Dickey Clay site
- Wide alleyways adjacent to downtown
- Second and third story spaces above downtown buildings
- Connectivity to the farmers market pavilion

Participants discussed several of the town’s assets, including the university and its small business development program, a wealth of civic groups like Pittsburg Beautiful and the Downtown Advisory Board, a city-operated land bank, two regional parks, coal pits in Pittsburg’s unincorporated perimeter, the nearby Crawford County Museum, a farmers market, new casino development, and historic buildings throughout the urban core.

Targets for near-term success:

- Completion of ongoing civic projects like Block 22
- A condition assessment of current building stock
- Revisiting bump outs and other traffic calming measures
- Revisiting the replanting of the tree canopy in downtown
- Relocating the Crawford County Historical Museum into Pittsburg
- Opening upper-story windows along downtown to build a sense of life
- Having live music in public spaces
- More frequent art walks
- More involvement from the arts community
- Capitalizing on existing cultural recreation like “Fried Chicken and Polka”

Following a productive discussion with various stakeholders—including residents, advocates, business owners and elected officials—Smart Growth America recommended the following next steps for Pittsburg:

1. Cultivate a mindset of change
2. Map ownership of downtown building stock
3. Compel downtown owners to care for and update their buildings
4. Make street design that incorporates Complete Streets principles relating to active transportation options part of all planning efforts.
5. Develop alleyways as new public spaces
6. Strengthen the community’s partnership with Pittsburg State University (PSU)
7. Bolster the Downtown Advisory Board’s efforts by dedicating a portion of current staff time to matters of the Downtown Overlay District.
8. Explore short term programming for redevelopment of the Dickey Clay site
9. Explore options and feasibility for reusing the Washington School building