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## Development Done Right

The following article is re-posted from today's PG:

### [Development done right](#)

Community agreements help spread the benefits of publicly subsidized projects

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

By Gabe Morgan and Sam Williamson

Pittsburghers have begun a long overdue discussion that could make our region an international model for just and sustainable development. This conversation could prevent future generations of Pittsburghers from inheriting deferred dreams, squandered opportunities and unintended consequences.

This conversation hasn't happened by accident. The determination of residents of the Hill District, the North Side, the city of Pittsburgh and the region to have a say in how their communities are developed has spurred this trend.

Three ongoing controversies have highlighted the issue:

- In winter 2007, as soon as the new Penguins arena was announced, Hill District residents began working together, forming the One Hill Community Benefits Agreement Coalition. They spent months organizing and getting input from the community before putting forward their Blueprint for a Livable Hill, laying out how the community hoped that arena-related development would proceed.
- On the North Side, residents and community organizations have welcomed the forthcoming Majestic Star Casino with the caveat that it must be a good neighbor — providing jobs and meeting environmental standards and proceeding with development in partnership with the community rather than in spite of the community.
- Residents from all over the city reacted strongly to the attempts to push through changes in signage at the new transportation center Downtown without going through the proper zoning and public-approval processes.

The arena, casino and transportation center disputes have awakened the public to the reality that development too often benefits the few at the expense of the many. The public has responded, "Not this time."

Whereas past debates focused singularly on how to attract development, we have finally begun to consider issues such as development standards and community benefits. Some have argued that this

broader discussion is an impediment to much-needed economic growth. Some seem to view development standards and community benefits as being mutually exclusive from or diametrically opposed to economic growth. But around the country experts now see these issues as bound together and mutually reinforcing.

Community benefits agreements are in fact pro-development, pro-business and pro-community, and the recent alliance of government and members of the community to work one out for the Hill is an example of Pittsburgh leaders recognizing this.

CBA's are win-win-win. They ensure redevelopment of urban areas and create multiuse, equitable and sustainable growth. They encourage good development by linking people of mixed incomes with affordable housing and good-paying jobs, which stimulates equitable economic growth that is, by discouraging sprawl, environmentally friendly.

Still, some economists ring alarm bells, suggesting that community input discourages investment. They should read a recent New York Times op-ed piece by economist and former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, who says the best way to remedy economic downturns in weak market cities such as Pittsburgh is "to increase the wages of the bottom two-thirds of Americans."

Community benefits agreements often assemble powerful community-labor coalitions. These coalitions are as essential to lifting the living standards of working families and their communities at the beginning of the 21st century as they were at the beginning of the 20th century.

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The truth is, in strong and weak markets alike, development standards and community benefits have proven to be good for business. If we do not include them in the development process, research shows that inequality is likely to grow. And inequality not only damages the quality of life of residents, it also hinders economic growth. Real economic growth comes from equitable development. Development standards and community benefits ensure that development is equitable and raises the quality of life of all residents — not just for developers. The Penguins ownership group has received significant public investment in multiple forms to build its new arena. This investment may make a lot of sense. The Penguins are a valuable corporate entity in Pittsburgh. And Penguins fans are right to embrace the organization's efforts to succeed as a hockey team.

But a public investment of this size should bring more of a return than simply the presence of a national sports team and a venue for Miley Cyrus. It should bring jobs that pay living wages and a regional economic stimulus that does not damage the environment.

Community benefits agreements and development standards are the only way to ensure that the greater community reaps the benefits of its huge investment in this private enterprise. This is not an either/or proposition; it is a both/and proposition, and the future of our region's economy depends on it.

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