

Transit-Oriented Development for Allegheny County



Executive Summary

In 2017, with funding from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, Port Authority of Allegheny County (PAAC) and the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) at the University of Pittsburgh partnered to bring transit oriented development (T.O.D.) expertise to 10 municipalities that host the greatest opportunities for T.O.D.: Baldwin Township, Bethel Park, Carnegie, Castle Shannon, Crafton, Dormont, Ingram, Mount Lebanon, Swissvale, and Wilkinsburg. The consultant team of Dover, Kohl & Partners; GAI Consultants; and Urban Design Associates joined Port Authority and CONNECT to provide expertise on tools and implementation methods for achieving T.O.D. in their municipalities. The resulting T.O.D. Resources Report includes two sections — a T.O.D. Best Practices Guide, and a T.O.D. Toolbox — and builds on the PAAC's Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines. It covers a variety of subjects, and recommends action items for achieving T.O.D. friendly zoning. This executive summary gives a brief overview of key elements of the report.

T.O.D. BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Before action is taken toward achieving T.O.D. it is important to have an understanding of what successful T.O.D. looks like. The T.O.D. Best Practices Guide describes the elements of successful transit-oriented development, equitable development strategies, background on the development process, code revision tools, revitalization strategies, RFQs and RFPs, implementation methods, market overviews, and local examples of T.O.D. This section briefly describes these subjects.

What is T.O.D.?

Historically, towns and cities were oriented around different types of transit. downtowns were built around train stations. However, dependence on the car created a pattern of development that was spread out and hurt traditional town centers. T.O.D. is a method of development that brings the focus back to transit stations and embraces elements of more concentrated forms of development. It consists of mixed-use, compact development within walking and biking distance of a transit station.

T.O.D. Design Tools

Successful T.O.D. creates places that people want to be. It makes use of certain planning design tools that work in harmony with transit stations to capitalize on the energy created by connecting people with transit. This section covers different design tools to consider in implementing T.O.D. and includes:

THE NEIGHBORHOOD UNIT

Complete neighborhoods provide housing, workplaces, shopping, civic functions, and more. There are five basic design conventions common among great neighborhoods, including: identifiable center and edge, walkable size, mix of uses and housing types, integrated network of walkable streets, and special sites reserved for civic uses.



Elements of T.O.D. Include:

1. Transit Station Areas
2. Compact Development
3. Walkability
4. Mix of Uses



Complete neighborhoods share common traits that make them pedestrian friendly places that people feel comfortable and seek out as destinations or places to live.

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THE ESSENTIAL ART OF STREET DESIGN

Streets are the main public realm in which we inhabit. Good streets can determine if a place is one people want to be in, walk through, or avoid and are comprised of five basic characteristics: shared, comfortable, connected, safe, and memorable.

PUBLIC SPACE: DESIGN MATTERS

While poorly designed public spaces tend to be skipped over by the public and feel more like “left over space”, well-designed public spaces are livelier with people of different backgrounds and lifestyles.

Equitable T.O.D.

While T.O.D. has many benefits, there may be unintended consequences related to development and property value increases. In many locations, rising values and loss of affordability in walking proximity to stations are some of the most concerning. This section discusses equitable T.O.D. goals, resources, neighborhood development concerns, areas of focus, key takeaways, and tools for providing affordable housing.

4 FOCUS AREAS FOR STABILIZATION & EQUITY

Four ways to support equitable development are: support existing owners, support first time buyers, support existing renters, and create new attainable and mixed income housing.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING GUIDE

The neighborhood context and the resources available will determine the policy package (combination of tools) that is appropriate for a given community. State enabling legislation may be needed to make certain tools possible. In the end, the right mix will preserve and create new affordable housing, while making T.O.D. neighborhoods more equitable. A robust kit of tools for equitable development can be sorted into five categories: Zoning & Planning, Financing & Funding, Partnerships, Tenant Support, and Shared Equity

Financing T.O.D.

Two important parties in the evolution of transit-oriented development are the developers who build the environment and the municipalities where the development occurs. Understanding the development process, the risks involved, and the potential sources of funding enables municipalities to have more realistic expectations of developers and how to work with them throughout the process.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Helping provide incentives and assistance for desired development can be difficult for a municipality when trying to determine where the money can come from. The report provides charts that show possible resources from the regional, state, and federal level as of 2019.

CAPTURING THE VALUE

It is important to keep in mind that offering incentives and providing assistance to developers is an investment made by the community. As with all investments, research should be conducted to ensure the best return.



Good streets encourage people to go outside, walk, bike, relax, and enjoy their community.

EQUITABLE T.O.D. NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

It is important to note that the tools that neighborhoods use while pursuing economic development and stabilization are different from those needed in market-viable neighborhoods trying to preserve affordability.

AVAILABLE LEVERS

The two main costs for developers are hard and soft costs and municipalities can provide incentives and assistance in the following ways:

Hard Costs

- Make Infrastructure Improvements
- Help with construction funding

Soft Costs

- Provide a Consistent Vision
- Simplify Land Acquisition
- Simplify Approvals / Permitting / Variances
- Help Close the Gap

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Code Revision Tools

There are a variety of policy tools that can be used to make zoning regulation changes in an effort to enable T.O.D: Conditional Use Permit, Amendments to Zoning Ordinance, Changes to a Zoning Map, Overlay Zoning District, Form-Based Code, Regulating Plan, and Station Area Master Plan.

Form-Based Codes

Streets and public spaces are shaped by the buildings that face them. A powerful tool some communities are using to proactively specify the type of physical environment they would like to have, and shape future development, is form-based codes (FBC). Form-based codes focus primarily on the physical form of development and can be used to realize a desired community vision. This section discusses aspects of form-based codes, including: regulating plan, building form standards, general standards, architectural standards, street standards.

Main Street Revitalization

A traditional main street is typically a highly walkable environment, where people can do many activities (live, work, shop, eat, use municipal resources and services, and be entertained) without having to use a car. This section provides a toolkit for that can be used including financing and organizational resources, and policy and regulation tools. It also discusses activation and programming strategies as well as the importance of historic preservation to the revitalization of main streets.

RFQs and RFPs: How to

Determining which developer to partner with can seem like a daunting task. There are many factors to consider, including ensuring that the municipal investment will see returns to the community. This section explains the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and Request for Proposals (RFP) process including: how to write a clear RFQ or RFP to attract the right developer, what to look for in a developer response, and other factors to consider throughout the process such as: confirmation of the scope and mission, prepared RFQ or RFP, soliciting qualifications and proposals, evaluating qualifications and proposals, and developer selection and negotiation.

A TWO-STEP PROCESS

A two-step “RFQ / RFP” process, requires more up front preparation but typically requires less negotiation at the end of the process since the expectations have been enumerated early in the process. The steps are:

- Step 1: Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
- Step 2: Request for Proposals (RFP)

Synoptic Surveys: How-to

A Synoptic Survey is a recording of existing dimensions of the built environment, such as setbacks, street width, and building height, to determine the urban design metrics of a place. It can be used to quantify and study the “good DNA” of precedent areas; this analysis can then be used to write the rules for future development and public improvements.

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical Urbanism refers to any low-cost, temporary changes to the built environment that are intended to improve local neighborhoods and public spaces. These changes are often used to test ideas and measure results before implementing a more permanent solution.

DEVELOPER DISCUSSION: KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Do RFQ’s not RFP’s
2. Do a Form-Based Code
3. Know what you are looking for
4. Get rid of minimum parking requirements
5. Project has to pencil out
6. “Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance” (LERTA)
7. Fine grain, small scale development
8. Plan it. Plan it. THEN sell it.
9. This is a long-term investment

MAIN STREETS ARE:

PUBLIC SPACES: A place for people to engage with friends and neighbors

MARKETPLACES: A place that promotes local businesses

HISTORIC DISTRICTS: A place that holds our stories

WALKABLE ENVIRONMENTS: A place that promotes healthy lifestyle choices like walking and biking

DESTINATIONS: A place to visit and a place to take visitors to



Synoptic Surveys can be repeated with municipal representatives and community groups.

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Market Overview

An important aspect of designing and implementing T.O.D. is to understand who the current residents are and who the potential future residents might be.

This section describes two groups – the first identifies people who live in the different transit areas of Allegheny County, and the other identifies people who live in Downtown Pittsburgh. This is important, because while first group likely makes up most of the municipalities outside of Pittsburgh, the group that lives Downtown is most likely to be attracted to T.O.D.

T.O.D. In the Pittsburgh region

During the July workshops, the team led discussions with each of the participating municipalities to discuss three examples of T.O.D. around the Pittsburgh Region:

1. EAST LIBERTY STATION
2. NORTH SIDE STATION
3. SOUTH HILLS VILLAGE STATION

T.O.D. TOOLBOX

The T.O.D. Best Practices Guide discusses best design practices to provide clarity on what successful T.O.D. looks like. It is intended to inform decisions and discussions about the vision of each municipality. The T.O.D. Toolkit is intended to provide guidance on actionable items to achieve T.O.D. This section presents findings from a cursory review of the comprehensive plans, bulk requirements, and parking regulations for parcels around transit stations. It highlights areas of strength and suggests areas for improvement to encourage T.O.D. Following the review of municipal regulations, this section presents a T.O.D. Self-Assessment, a sample Synoptic Survey, and a list of Technical and Financial Resources available to help meet the goals and action items.

T.O.D. Self-Assessment Tool

A T.O.D. Self-Assessment is a tool that a municipality can use to determine what types of steps should be taken prior to beginning a T.O.D. zoning effort. It asks questions to determine what groups should be contacted, what public opinion might be, what types of educational efforts might be needed, and what local governing agencies might need more engagement. A sample self-assessment has been included in this section for municipalities to reference while undergoing T.O.D. zoning revisions.

Technical Assistance and Funding Resources

The Technical and Financial Resources are included within the section and categorized into different available resources for municipalities. They have been categorized into three groups — Local, State and Regional, and National. These groups provide guidance and financial resources for different efforts associated with T.O.D. zoning.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the market overview in the following pages, the following are general recommendations to inform T.O.D. implementation.

1. Provide a wider variety of housing choices for a variety of people seeking a T.O.D. lifestyle.
2. Encourage more restaurants and dining experiences.
3. Encourage more services from experience-based small shops and services.



Tactical installations should keep all ages in mind



Tactical installations can increase access for pedestrians through bike lanes, landscaping, and parallel parking. These narrow the street and reduce speeding, making the right-of-way safer for pedestrians