The Open Space and Art Working Group worked closely with the Transportation and Gateways working group to develop a comprehensive plan for the public spaces in Polish Hill. It started with the premise that public art improves the environment aesthetically and culturally, adding beauty, unique character and new opportunities to engage with neighbors. Working with existing green neighborhood initiatives, the group developed a series of recommendations for greening neighborhood streets and public places, integrating art into the everyday fabric of the community.

Discussion topics
- Exploring ways of using art to calm traffic.
- Developing neighborhood branding and billboards.
- Using art and lighting to creatively deal with neighborhood infrastructure such as overpasses.
- Developing a plan for maintaining hillsides.
- Knotweed eradication plan.
- Greenway connections (Coordinate with Transportation and Gateways).
- Developing green streets within the neighborhood.
- Creative stair proposals.

Values and Vision
- Preserve and strengthen the natural green spaces surrounding Polish Hill. Respect and enhance the green infrastructure and open spaces to create a more sustainable, livable community.
- Foster the connection between residents and the natural environment.
- Create public spaces that are welcoming and inspiring, where people can congregate in a safe, positive, supportive, friendly environment.
- Actively integrate artistic and creative solutions into new and ongoing projects, leveraging the social and environmental benefits of green, open spaces.

Introduction
The community workshops revealed that while art was very important to the heart and soul of Polish Hill, its definition and role in community planning was open to debate and discussion. In the public workshops many felt that creative projects should emerge out of the authentic life of the community and that art works best when it is a form of individual expression. As a result, neighborhood initiatives should not endorse art, but establish a culture to ‘let art happen’. To guide this development the steering committee established a series of guideposts and values.

Definition: Creative or artistic outreach means enhancing the daily experience between our residents and their surroundings, in both formal and informal ways. A more formal approach might be Polish Hill artists working in tandem with planning teams to bring their distinct perspective to projects like the proposed Roundhouse Park. An informal approach might be a movement that begins with one artist crafting an outdoor bench, bringing creativity to our sidewalks and traffic-calming to our streetscapes.

Guidepost: As creative community builders, we will incorporate art and inspiration into our daily lives. Community art is not only about creating visually inspiring projects; it is also about engaging participation across a diverse range of residents. It then becomes a vehicle for community building, transformation and growth.

Out of this discussion a series of projects was developed.

A. Brereton-Dobson intersection and monument
B. 28th Street Gateway and Roundhouse Park
C. Downing Overlook Improvements
D. Bloomfield Bridge/Gold Way Gateway
E. Public Infrastructure Improvements
Owned and maintained by the City of Pittsburgh, the small triangle of land at the tip of the Dobson-Brereton triangle is one of the few public spaces in Polish Hill’s business district. The site is home to a memorial for Polish Hill residents who served in the U.S. Armed Forces of all wars, donated by the Ladies Auxiliary of V.F.W. Post 704. It also contains a series of steps and walls to retain the grade, an evergreen spruce tree that is decorated for the holidays, a set of benches and a bus shelter.

While the retaining walls, steps, rails and benches are in good condition, the site lacks shade and is not particularly welcoming to the public. Community workshops revealed that increasing the usability of this space would help address a lack of usable public space in the center of Polish Hill. While it would need to be designed, this new space could maintain the same functions, while being more user friendly and more of a neighborhood gathering space. Additional ideas for the monument site included:

- Vertical Green Space
- A fountain or water feature
- Improved seating
- Native ornamental landscaping
- Dog amenities
- Shelter, gazebo, pavilion, or bandstand
- Energy efficient LED lighting
- Bike parking
- Integrate art or murals
The 28th Street Gateway has immense potential as a scenic point of entry into Polish Hill. The historic steel truss bridge, stone wall, and views of the city provide drama and quick connections to the Strip District and Downtown. However, the lack of lighting, sharp turns, and minimal signage make this streetscape feel like a vehicular shortcut between Downtown and the East End rather than a true entrance into the neighborhood.

The bridge can be greatly improved to include lighting, planting, and art to create a more vibrant pedestrian space and a space that is safe for cyclists. Lighting and painting the bridge would help introduce the identity of the neighborhood as a unique place with a strong grassroots art scene and civic engagement. Improvements that have been recommended at the 28th Street Gateway include:

A. Lighting the 28th Street Bridge.
B. Increasing the walkability over the Bridge by ensuring that there is a barrier between people and cars.
C. Greening the Bridge, including the addition of planters.
D. Announcing the entrance into Polish Hill through creative signage.
E. Bike safety improvements.
F. Repair and reopening of the steps to Liberty Avenue.
G. Roundhouse Park and landscape improvements.
H. Future Monument Site commemorating The Great Railroad Strike of 1877.
Herron Connection

Owned by the Port Authority of Allegheny County, the long strips of vacant green space is fenced off, preventing residents from accessing the site. The area in front of the fence is currently lined with parked cars and overgrown with brush and weeds. Local artists have installed birdhouses and magnetic poetry bulletin boards along the fence edge.

Residents of Polish Hill would like to develop the Downing Street parcel into a passive recreation park space, for dog-walkers and picnickers, retaining parking along the street edge. With its potential views of the Allegheny River, one could imagine a series of benches, tables and overlooks along the edge of the hillside. The birdhouses and other installation art could be reincorporated into the new design. Other features of the Downing Overlook might include flower beds and improvements to the stairs to Lower Herron Avenue.
The parking lot, overpass and series of buildings at the intersection of the Bloomfield Bridge and Bigelow Boulevard mark the eastern boundary of Polish Hill. Thousands of motorists use this thoroughfare daily to access Downtown Pittsburgh and the East End neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. While currently this gateway is defined by its unsightly concrete highway infrastructure, there are opportunities for greening and beautification.

While the long term vision for Bigelow Boulevard includes a “road diet” and transformation of the roadway into a green, multimodal urban boulevard, workshop participants identified short term opportunities to work with the existing roadway and infrastructure. Proposed improvements at the upper portion of the Bloomfield Bridge Gateway included:

A. Integrating art and lighting into the overpasses and retaining walls
B. New streetscape tree plantings
C. Integrating art into the billboards
D. Facade makeovers
E. New signage and site lighting

Bloomfield Bridge Gateway
In recent years, the traditional definition of green infrastructure as green space in an urban environment has expanded to include man made structures and environments such as buildings (green roofs), streets, sidewalks, and storm water utilities.

“Green infrastructure differs from conventional approaches to open space planning because it looks at conservation values and actions in concert with land development, growth management and built infrastructure planning. Other conservation approaches typically are undertaken in isolation from — or even in opposition to — development.”

Mark Benedict and Edward McMahon, Green Infrastructure: Smart Conservation for the 21st Century, 2002

While Polish Hill is very fortunate to have large expanses of green open space, these very assets have also proven to be challenges to the neighborhood. Hillside subsidence, undermining, invasive species, erosion, and storm water flooding have all had a negative impact on the neighborhood and quality of life. To address this challenge, workshop participants discussed how to turn Polish Hill’s infrastructure into more sustainable features of the community.

The following list of potential projects emerged as the list of green infrastructure priorities.

Public Infrastructure Priorities

A. Sidewalk repairs and retaining walls (integrate art, craft into these renovations)
B. Public stair improvements (integrate lighting, art)
C. Vertical greening: window boxes, green walls, and roofs
D. Storm water strategies (rain gardens, hillsides)
In addition to the projects listed above, the Open Space and Art Working Group developed a set of policy recommendations to improve Polish Hill's public realm. They are outlined below.

**Community Art Policy Recommendations**

A. Educate and expand the concept of art to include neighborhood improvements and infrastructure, not just murals and traditional public sculpture (a.k.a. ‘plop art’).

B. Provide informal support to creative activity in the neighborhood.

C. Identify spaces for future work and projects and create a catalog of potential project sites— i.e. “It would be great if something would happen here.”

D. Encourage more events and venues for visual art, performance and other creative activities.

**Open Space Policy Recommendations**

A. Pursue strategies to develop civic open space at the center of the neighborhood (i.e., Brereton/Dobson/monument site).

B. Develop strategies through public/private partnerships to help maintain and enhance public infrastructure.

C. Support greenways development and native species revitalization efforts and control invasive plants; promote landscape restoration strategies.

D. Encourage urban farming (greenhouses, community gardens).

E. Work with Citiparks to make West Penn Park more usable, exploring options to create spaces for dogs, children, and other groups in need of open space.