

## **Lower Hill Block 2 Urban Open Space Project Narrative**

### **Connecting and Enhancing the Public Realm**

Block F2 Urban Open Space is part of a cohesive and contiguous framework of parks and public spaces for the Lower Hill redevelopment. The design intent of Block F2's Urban Open Space and the Lower Hill Planned Development District is to re-integrate the Hill District's historical and cultural legacy through art, culture, and economic development without displacing existing residents and businesses. It serves as a gateway to the neighboring community and champions the Hill's legacy. Opportunities exist to reflect the strong cultural history of the site when defining the character of this new city neighborhood.

The site is both a transitional space and a destination, emphasizing connectivity as much as it does gathering. It is the westernmost gateway of the Lower Hill Master Plan's comprehensive Urban Open Space framework that stretches eastward to Crawford Square and the historic Hill District Neighborhood, as well as historic and cultural sites such as the August Wilson House and Freedom Corner nearby. Situated at the corner of Washington Place and Centre Avenue, and stretching to Logan Street, Block F2 is part of a connected series of open spaces that will link the Lower Hill along the re-established Wylie Avenue corridor to the recently completed Frankie Pace Park and Pittsburgh's downtown business district, and beyond.

The 1.27-acre site will extend the open space now under construction and will provide community gathering spaces featuring an event lawn, overlooks, informal amphitheater, seating terraces, gardens, plazas, and pavilions which support active and passive uses. Block F2 will also provide continuous universal accessibility throughout the entire site from Washington Place to Logan Street when fully built out.

Spaces for activity and gathering will be located throughout the site to create a vibrant Urban Open Space. Seat walls, terraced gardens, and informal amphitheater-style seating will seamlessly integrate into the walkway configurations. Serving as an extension of Wylie Ave, a grand staircase will bisect the site to connect the everyday user and event patron from Frankie Pace Park to the greater development and Hill District Neighborhood beyond. Several cantilevered overlooks will offer a viewshed of Frankie Pace Park and Downtown Pittsburgh. An array of terraces and green spaces will foster informal gatherings, outdoor dining, small and large events, individual activities, and community functions.

As the adjacent blocks are developed, the urban open space will be flanked by retail, restaurants, and other venues, as well as integrating retail kiosks into the landscape to foster local economic growth. The retail kiosks will draw visitors and neighboring residents to the activated public space. Movable furniture and a variety of seating arrangements will accommodate a host of user preferences and functions. The site will provide flexible public spaces that foster a vibrant and inclusive hub of activity extending beyond the master plan framework to both Downtown and

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the Hill District. New opportunities for programming and activation will give rise to a transformational urban public realm.

### **Commitment to Universal Accessibility and Sustainability**

The Block F2 site boasts over 35 feet of grade change between Washington Place and Logan Street, making the integration of universal design principles imperative for a successful Urban Open Space to provide equal opportunities for all users. The site design responds directly to the site's topography, giving special attention to the alignment and grades of walkways and terraced open spaces to allow for a universally accessible public realm. The location of all other site features is derived from the primary path network traversing the site. The landscape design is molded into the site's steep topography and uses a series of switchback pathways to facilitate universal accessibility throughout the space.

In concert with the redevelopment's commitment to sustainability, the design utilizes the open space for stormwater management and infiltration, as well as a palette of primary native planting and materials that complement the other public open space improvements in the Lower Hill. Tall Green Ash trees will give height, shade, and fall color to the site. Dogwoods, Eastern Redbuds, and Serviceberry will show seasonal interest as understory trees throughout the year. The bark of the canopy and understory trees and stems of the Red Osier dogwoods and Witch Hazel will give color and form during the winter months.

### **Open Space Access and Maintenance**

The SP-11 Lower Hill District regulations, the PLDP and the Option Agreement provide further clarity specific to this redevelopment site of the goals and intent of the planned Urban Open Spaces. The City and Authorities were clear in the early discussions that they did not want to receive completed open spaces and bear the responsibility for maintenance and operation. The public open spaces were to be created by the developer and redevelopers and maintained at their expense. The resulting operative documents and the specific plans presented for G1 and G4 parcels are consistent with that framework.

The City of Pittsburgh has several examples of high-quality public open spaces that have been developed by private and public partners, such as PPG Plaza, Washington's Landing, SouthSide Works, and North Shore Riverfront. Whether owned by the private property owner or by an owner's association, the spaces are open to the public, accessible, maintained and programmed for public benefit. In the instance of the SouthSide Works, Washington's Landing and the North Shore Riverfront, the URA and SEA retain a role in the common elements of the completed open spaces.

Beyond this overall objective of public access and benefit, redevelopers of the Lower Hill District are expected to create spaces that are consistent with the Focus Areas of the Community Collaboration and Implementation Plan (CCIP), particularly Wealth Building Initiatives, Cultural and Community Legacy Initiatives, and Coordinated Community Development Strategies.