

# Allegheny Commons



## Historic fountain restoration is first Parks Conservancy project in Northside's Allegheny Commons

The founders of Pittsburgh's public parks understood well the value of fountains to the urban experience. With their sprays and splashes of sparkling water, fountains delight the senses and provide a respite from the harsher sounds and sights of the built environment. They bring together friends, family, and strangers, and serve as a point of entry into the larger park landscape. Once, four large ornamental fountains drew people from all walks of life to enjoy Allegheny Commons park on Pittsburgh's North Side. Over the years, as City budgets became more constrained, all of the fountains were filled in. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is working in partnership with the Allegheny Commons Initiative and the Northside Leadership Conference to bring the fountain in the North Commons at the corner of Cedar and North Avenues back to life. This prominent corner faces Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh King K-8 School, and is adjacent to the Historic Deutschtown Neighborhood.

The Allegheny Commons Fountain restoration is part of a long-range master plan to restore Pittsburgh's oldest park and to spur continued revitalization of the Northside community. The project, comprising approximately one city block, includes reconstruction of the historic fountain and surrounding gardens, as well as installation of new pathways and signage, benches, lighting, and other amenities.

When completed, the Allegheny Commons Fountain project will transform this highly-visible corner into a greenspace overflowing with vitality and promise.

### A Historic Park

Allegheny Commons was designed in 1867 for what was then the City of Allegheny, becoming Pittsburgh's Northside by annexation in 1907. The creation of the park reflected the 19th-century movement to beautify American cities and improve urban living conditions. Well-known predecessors were New York's Central Park and Philadelphia's Fairmount Park. Designed by the New York firm of Mitchell & Grant, the plan for Allegheny Commons included more than 60 acres of broad lawns, tree-lined paths, fountains and benches, a picturesque lake, monuments, and ornamental flowerbeds.



Architectural rendering of planned North Allegheny Commons fountain restoration.

Although Allegheny Commons fell into disrepair over the years, its green spaces, fresh air, and recreational opportunities still keep it vital. The 17,000 residents of the ethnically, racially and economically diverse neighborhoods that surround the park consider it their green front yard. The Commons is also the fabric connecting many businesses and cultural organizations, among them Allegheny Health Network's flagship hospital, the National Aviary, the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, New Hazlett Theater, Community College

of Allegheny County, The Andy Warhol Museum, and the Mattress Factory. As such, the park serves an incredibly wide demographic: residents, employees, school children, regional visitors and tourists, and Pirates and Steelers fans alike.

## Economic Benefits

With its stunning views and access to Downtown, Allegheny Commons also offers great potential for economic revitalization. A study by the Trust for Public Land suggests that parks have a significant impact on surrounding real estate and can add 15% or more to fair market value, attracting both commercial and residential investment. This has been borne out in other major cities, such as Boston and New York - as well as in downtown Pittsburgh's own Mellon Square - where urban parks surrounded by homes and businesses have spurred economic development. Further studies show that businesses are more likely to locate in an area with well-maintained parks because they know that knowledge workers and other talent consider parks essential to their quality of life.

Recognizing the value of Allegheny Commons to the community, a citizen group came together in 1999 to chart a course for reclaiming the park's original purpose and grandeur. In 2002, a master plan was completed by renowned historic landscape architecture firm, Pressley Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts to guide the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and maintenance of the park.

## The Plan

The plan recommends reconstructing the fountain in the North Commons to its original 1868 design: a 50-foot circular basin, with a rim of cast stone. At its center sits a large Grecian vase, with a principal jet and 16 smaller jets around the inside of the basin. Four ornamental planting beds hug the fountain's rim. The landscape plan rehabilitates the lawn and restores the magnificent tree canopy with historic trees as well as trees that are resistant to weather and disease.

The project also improves aspects of the park which are in disrepair and discourage public use: restored and new pathways, new lighting, signage, and benches will increase use, security, and safety.

## Implementation and Support

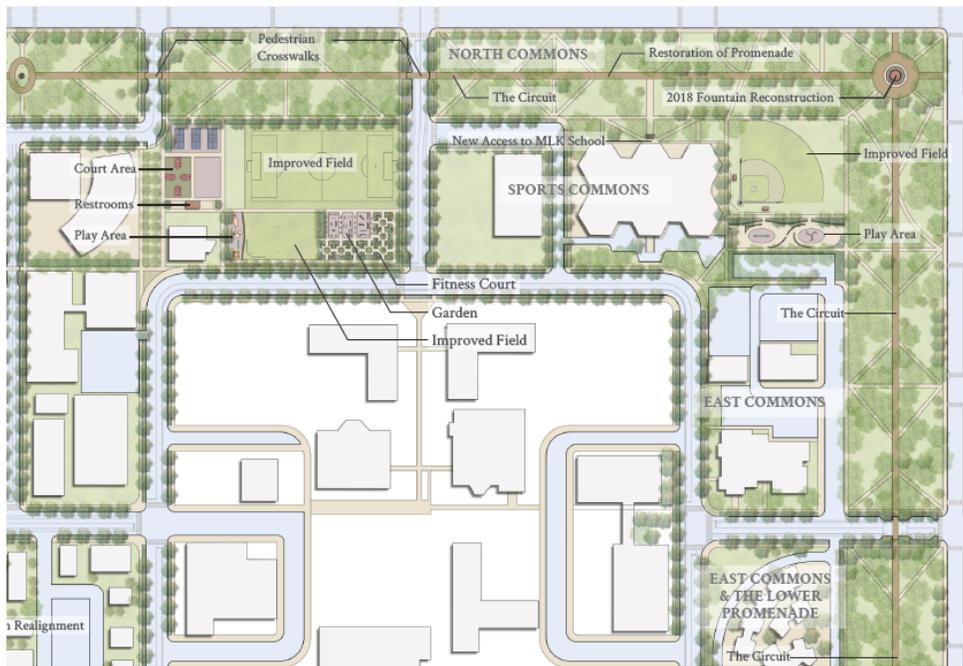
The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is overseeing fundraising, project design, and construction management for the Allegheny Commons Fountain Restoration project. Over the past 20 years, the Conservancy has spearheaded more than \$100 million in capital improvements for Pittsburgh's four major parks, as well as projects in neighborhood parks across the City. These include restoration of four historic fountains: Highland Park Entry Garden, Mellon Park Walled Garden, Mary E. Schenley Memorial Fountain, and the fountains at Mellon Square. Each of these fountains has created a signature landmark and destination that people visit time and again.

The Parks Conservancy is working closely with the Allegheny Commons Initiative as the community's voice and advocate for the Allegheny Commons, along with the Northside Leadership Conference to fully engage business and

institutional community stakeholders. Project design is completed; the project was successfully bid in late 2016 and construction is beginning this spring. The \$2.5 million project goal includes a maintenance fund of \$750,000 to ensure that improvements to the area will be supported into the future.

Recognition opportunities to support the Allegheny Commons Fountain project are available at a

number of gift levels. For more information about the project and ways to get involved, please contact Kathleen Gaines, Acting Director of Development, at 412-682-7275, ext. 213, or [kgaines@pittsburghparks.org](mailto:kgaines@pittsburghparks.org).



North Commons Fountain (upper right corner of rendering) is a key welcoming point to Allegheny Commons.



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