

MILLVALE ECODISTRICT

PITTSBURGH, PA, USA • JULY, 2017



THE BOROUGH OF MILLVALE

NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

Affectionately called a “rural town in an urban city”, Millvale is a low- to middle-income neighborhood of nearly 4,000 people that sits across the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh. Historically, Millvale was a town of steel industry with a thriving economy and a population of over 10,000 people. However, as with many industrial towns, Millvale has seen a great economic shift that accelerated the decline of the blue-collar workforce. Since the 1970s, the community has struggled with poor air and water quality, economic downturns, flooding, and lack of healthy food access. Flooding from hurricane remnants and heavy rains hit Millvale in 2004 and 2007, which served as the catalyst for residents and leaders in the town to advance sustainable district-wide development as the key approach for economic redevelopment.

While the Pittsburgh region is undergoing widespread development, Millvale stands unique among this backdrop due to more than a decade of resident-led, grassroots efforts that have created real, on-the-ground change. This includes the development of the area’s first and only sustainable library, innovative food hubs, solar arrays, and the implementation of bioswales, community gardens, and composting facilities. As Pittsburgh and surrounding communities started to experience economic growth due to the region’s growing universities, medical, and technology fields, Millvale began looking at the EcoDistricts approach to sustainable planning.

SNAPSHOT

PROJECT TYPE: Existing Neighborhood

SITE SIZE: 448 acres

RESIDENTS: 3,744

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 26.1% below poverty line
- White: 93.1%
- Black: 3.8%
- Mixed Race: 2.1%
- Mixed Race White + Black: 1.1%
- American Indian: 0.3%
- Asian: 0.2%
- Other: 0.5%

ECONOMY:

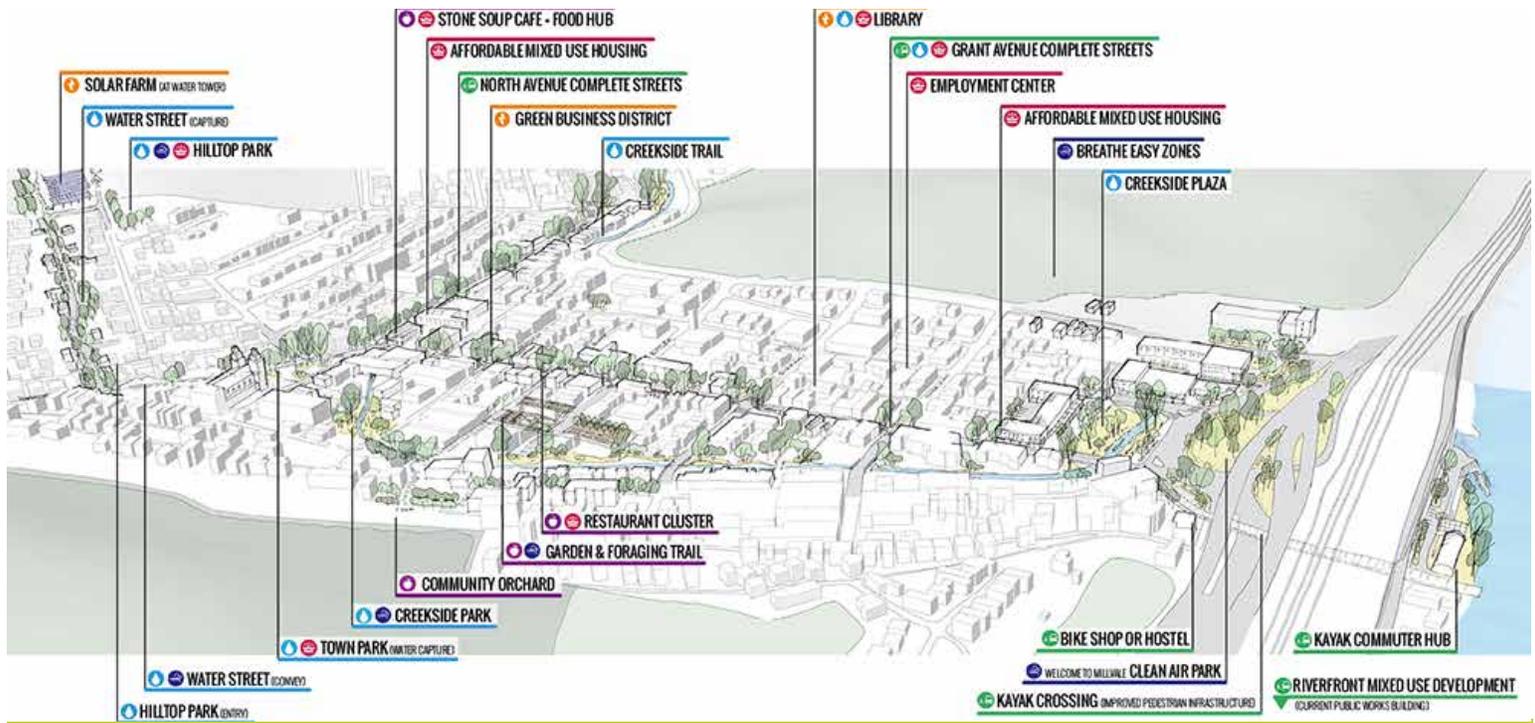
Median family income: \$47,888
Unemployment rate: 5.84%

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES:

Community Engagement, Affordable Housing, Mixed-Use Development, Placemaking, Youth and Adult Education and Training, Local Food Production, Complete Streets, Alternative Transportation, Green Infrastructure, Sustainable Stormwater, Solar Energy, Public Health.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:

- The Borough of Millvale
- The Millvale Community Library
- The Millvale Community Development Corporation
- New Sun Rising
- evolveEA
- The City of Pittsburgh



The Millvale Borough, Millvale Community Development Corporation, the Millvale Library, and a non-profit partner, New Sun Rising, partnered with evolveEA, a sustainable architecture and consulting firm based in Pittsburgh, to hold intensive community planning sessions with community leaders and residents, with the aim to highlight ways in which Millvale can continue to grow and change in a positive direction. From 2012 to 2013, community leaders engaged hundreds of stakeholders to develop the Millvale Pivot Plan 1.0, which aimed at addressing the area’s energy, water, and food desert challenges.

By mid-2015, Millvale had implemented over 70% of its initial goals for the community. Ready to move forward with more aggressive goals, Millvale and evolveEA dove deeper into the process and collaboration needed to implement long-term community goals and strategies. Through a series of community meetings and focus groups, Millvale engaged over 100 local residents, business owners, city and regional stakeholders, community partners, and subject matter experts to share ideas and discuss Millvale’s future. In early 2016, evolveEA and Millvale published the Millvale Pivot Plan 2.0 to incorporate Air Quality, Mobility, and Equity goals into their plans along with updates to their existing Food, Water, and Energy visions. To succeed, the implementation of the Pivot 2.0 Plan needed to incorporate a more formal approach to collaboration across stakeholder groups. Millvale stakeholders recognized that the EcoDistricts Protocol provides this rigor.

ABOUT THE ECODISTRICTS CERTIFIED PROGRAM

EcoDistricts Certified is the standard for community development that makes equity and sustainability fundamental to neighborhoods for all. By embracing the standard, neighborhoods commit to becoming the first certified EcoDistricts in the world. EcoDistricts Certified is the result of seven years of research, pilot projects and the best thinking from international experts. It provides a flexible, holistic, and rigorous “how to” framework for organizing and achieving important public policy, sustainability, and investment goals.

Learn more at:

<https://ecodistricts.org/ecodistricts-certified/>



PROJECT GOVERNANCE

In September 2016, the Ecodistrict Collaborative was formed to provide a governing structure for the Ecodistrict. The Millvale Ecodistrict is governed by four organizations: the Borough of Millvale, the Millvale Community Library, the Millvale Community Development Corporation, and New Sun Rising. Known as the Founding Organizations, all four organizations have a shared oversight of implementing Ecodistrict plans.



The Borough of Millvale serves as the Ecodistrict's backbone organization, supporting the Ecodistrict with governmental functions. The Community Library provides expertise on community engagement, education, job training, and equity work. The Millvale Community Development Corporation focuses on community development initiatives, including business growth and food production. New Sun Rising, a non-profit, provides programs to train, resource, and connect cross-sector leaders and entrepreneurs for neighborhood-scale impact and small business incubation. The Founding Organizations meet quarterly to strategize and oversee Ecodistrict implementation plans.

IMPERATIVES

The certification process begins with a district's commitment to the Imperatives that underpin the Protocol: Equity, Resilience, and Climate Protection. These are indispensable cornerstones of neighborhood sustainability, and making a firm pledge to them at the outset of the process ensures their integration in the Formation, Roadmap, and Performance phases.



1. EQUITY

The Millvale EcoDistrict will be home to a diversity of people, who have access to and choices for health care, education, jobs, and affordable housing and products, contributing to a high quality of life. Millvale defines the Equity Imperative as fairness in the development of the community, and creating a sense of ownership over the growth that is taking place in Millvale through creating access to opportunity for our residents. Though all four Founding Organizations are involved in Equity, the Millvale Library is the core partner in delivering Equity based programming, such as adult and youth education, job readiness, and maker programs to promote a stronger workforce. This also means bridging the digital information divide by creating public access to online services.



RENDERING OF KAYAK CROSSING



MILLVALE TEEN SOLAR FELLOWSHIP

2. RESILIENCE

Millvale strives towards the Resilience Imperative by incorporating flood mitigation and recovery strategies alongside economic growth goals to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen institutions as well as buildings. An example of resilience planning is the ongoing development of public buildings that can unplug from the electrical grid as needed and operate on renewable energy. In the event of a grid malfunction during a natural disaster, Millvale will have public spaces for shelter and to run basic municipal operations. Resilience work is evenly distributed between the four Founding Organizations. Food relative initiatives are run by the MCDC, and business development is run by New Sun Rising.



3. CLIMATE PROTECTION

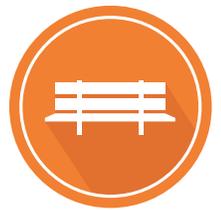
Millvale acts on the Climate Protection Imperative by creating positive impacts for the climate through programs and projects that also have positive economic impacts. This involves reducing stormwater impacts, creating more renewable energy sources, growing food within the community, improving air quality, and creating alternative transportation options. Climate Protection work is evenly distributed between the four Founding Organizations.



EARLY WINS

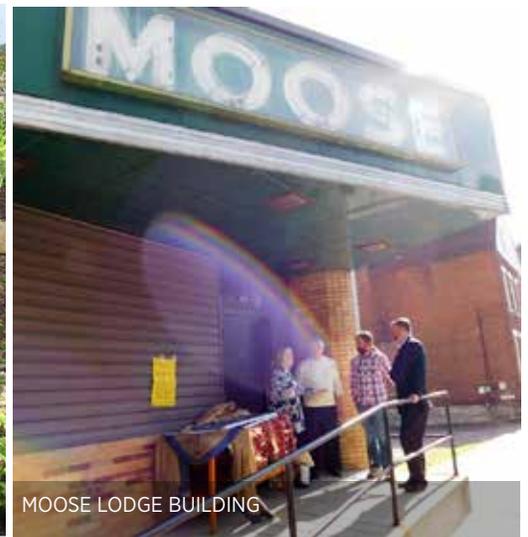
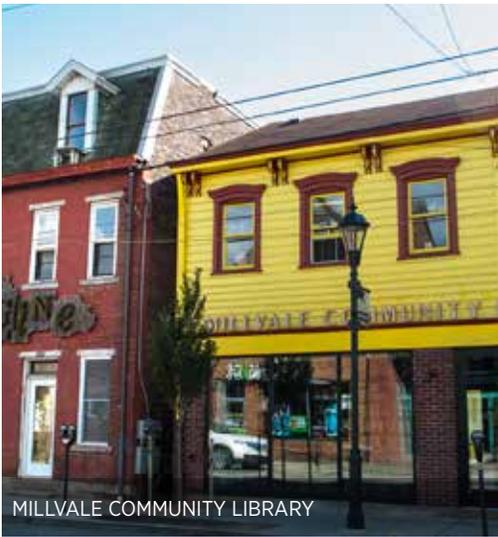
Millvale Ecodistrict has become a leader in crafting an Ecodistrict framework for community planning. evolveEA and its Millvale partners have earned two national American Planning Association (APA) awards for their Ecodistrict Pivot Plan. Millvale received the Silver 2017 National Planning Achievement Award for Environmental Planning, as well as the APA Sustainable Communities Division's Sustainability or Resiliency Plan Award. Over the years, the community has utilized the Pivot Plan as a template to revitalize the Borough. The projects and programs below describe several of Millvale's accomplished sustainability projects, as well as what is to come between now and 2030.

PLACE: In 2014, the Millvale Community Development Corporation acquired two buildings in the centrally located Town Square Project. One of the buildings had laid vacant since the 2004 flood, and the other was the recently closed Jerry Kitman Fine Furniture building, which had been a central component of the community for decades. These two buildings will serve as the foundation for a new mixed-use development with ground floor retail and affordable micro-unit housing above. While still in the planning process, the Kitman Building Mixed-Use Redevelopment could house up to 30 new housing units and 9,000 square feet of solar panels. Such energy potential could offset residential energy usage and establish an energy hub in the town center.



The Millvale Community Library considers itself more than just a library: it is an agent for positive change, supporting the community economically, socially, and ecologically. The Millvale Community Library is the first ever public, non-profit library in Millvale. Planning for the library began in 2007 and was completed by a team of hard-working community volunteers in 2013. This innovative library facility is the heart of the community and is the central hub for dynamic educational and occupational programming and community-based support for children and families in the Millvale area.

In addition, the library promotes environmental stewardship through solar panels, a rain garden and cistern, a community garden, and a clean air filtration system. Environmental programming includes education on gardening for youth and transparency on solar energy production. Community programming at the library includes GED test prep, job training, and resources for homeownership. Millvale and evolveEA collaborated on a year-long program to educate residents and community leaders about sustainable economic development. This created a shared vocabulary between residents and planners during the planning process, which led to a plan that is more reflective of what the community wanted.



PROSPERITY: In January 2017, the Millvale Library launched the Millvale Teen Solar Fellowship, connecting Millvale teens to the technical aspects of solar technology, sustainability, and careers in the solar industry. This four-month program offered 10 Millvale teens, ages 12-18, monthly educational workshops to learn about different topics within the solar industry. In Spring 2017, the Millvale solar fellows concluded their fellowship by shadowing the installation of a 30kW solar array at the Millvale Community Center. The fellowship combines the energy and equity goals of Millvale’s Ecodistrict Pivot 2.0 plan.



When Millvale residents expressed interest in greater access to healthy food and food security, New Sun Rising created the Launch Millvale Program in 2015. This 12-month program provides space for socially-focused entrepreneurs to research, test, and implement plans, as well as to create new opportunities around food security and employment. Launch Millvale has a three-level approach to its programming: individual team success through business model planning and funding strategies, teams developing a cohort to improve food system models, and engagement as a food hub in their home community of Millvale.

New Sun Rising purchased the historic Moose Lodge building to redevelop into the organization’s new headquarters, as well as co-working office space, a shared commercial kitchen, artist-in-residence space, and events. This new building will allow for 20 new jobs to be created in the community. Neighborhood Allies and LISC have provided the project’s lead funding. Architecture firms, evolveEA and ATK Design Studios LLC are working on building design. cooking classes to the community. The communal kitchen space will offer locally sourced food at affordable prices, as well as nutritional and cooking classes for the community. New Sun Rising and its partners are actively exploring additional ways that the project will improve the Ecodistrict’s energy and food resiliency goals.

HEALTH + WELLBEING: Millvale is considered a food desert because over one third of the population lives more than one mile away from a grocery store. However, fresh food access and hyperlocal production is a central part of Millvale’s vision for sustainability. The Gardens of Millvale, a volunteer-led community garden, was set up in 2010 to transform the Ecodistrict into an urban farming leader and provide growing, volunteer, and educational opportunities. The Gardens of Millvale is a project of the Millvale Community Development Corporation and is part of New Sun Rising’s Launch Millvale Program. The Gardens of Millvale will not only continue to grow food in their existing orchard, hoop house and 8-lot community garden, but also aim to provide up to 95% of the food needs for Millvale’s future restaurant cluster. With help from a Neighborhood Allies grant, the Gardens have recently purchased a series of parcels that they already utilize in order to protect them from development.





COMMUNITY MEETING WITH EVOLVEEA

The Millvale Ecodistrict is actively working towards having the cleanest indoor and outdoor air in the region to reduce the number and severity of air quality-related health issues and related costs for residents. In 2016, the Heinz Endowment funded a baseline study on Millvale’s air quality. After analyzing the results, evolveEA published a recommendation report for air quality planning in Millvale. Through a series of community meetings, Millvale and evolveEA engaged with over 100 residents, business owners, city and regional stakeholders, and community partners to share programming ideas and discuss Millvale’s air quality. Some of the recommendations for minimizing sources and exposure include: policies, community education, individual actions, and placemaking projects, such as a Clean Air Park. This type of park would help block pollution created by cars on the adjacent highway so residents have an outdoor area where they can breathe easy.

CONNECTIVITY: The Millvale Borough Bike and Pedestrian Committee (MBBPC) was formed in 2014 through funding support from the Heinz Endowments Summer Youth Philanthropy Program. The MBBPC’s mission is to guide the Millvale and its neighboring municipalities through the design and implementation process of establishing a safe shared roadway for bicyclists, pedestrians and motorized vehicle operators. Additionally, The MBBPC was approached by the American Heart and Lung Association about an ordinance for complete streets in the EcoDistrict and is offering technical assistance to create the ordinance. Complete Streets in Millvale would be designed to enable access for all users, ages and abilities. Designs could include: improved pedestrian infrastructure, a network of street trees, bike-friendly intersections and bike lanes, and improved public transit accommodations.



The current use of public transportation is difficult for Millvalians traveling short distances, such as visiting downtown Pittsburgh. To combat this, the Millvale Borough has expanded transportation options for both residents and visitors, which includes the creation of a riverfront park, connecting to bicycle trails along the riverfront that lead to downtown Pittsburgh (and Washington, DC). The Borough has also installed bike sharrows and bike racks on major Millvale streets.

To emphasize Millvale’s unique connection to the Allegheny River and provide additional alternative transportation options, the Millvale community imagined solutions for mobility chokepoints that reflect their unconventional culture, such as a Kayak Commuter Hub and Kayak Crossing Intersection. The Kayak Crossing is an opportunity to advocate for integration of complete street principles into the PennDOT controlled intersection to improve safety and create a strong community identity.

LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE: Millvale's identity is formed by water. Girty's Run, a tributary stream, winds throughout Millvale and outputs in the adjacent Allegheny River. However, Millvale is severely affected by flooding during intense storm events. Millvale is particularly affected by runoff and subsequent flooding due to significant residential and commercial development upstream. Although Girty's Run was engineered into culverts, its banks overflowed significantly during floods in 2004 and 2007. To turn this challenge into an opportunity, Millvale is working towards becoming a water town with water integrated into productive and pleasurable landscapes.



To create greater connectivity between watershed groups, Millvale has held the Girty's Run Citizen Summit since 2013. These community meetings invite all the municipalities in the watershed to publicly share the work they are doing to reduce stormwater impacts. This has allowed groups to leverage their resources and share best practices to develop more green infrastructure solutions.

Through a partnership with TreeVitalize, a tree planting initiative managed by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, 850 trees have been planted in Millvale to address stormwater issues. The series of tree plantings included street trees along the business district and restoration plantings along the Riverfront Park.

In addition to street trees, Millvale's green infrastructure projects include four large-scale bioswales and rain gardens to reduce stormwater flows. These projects are located at the Millvale Community Library, the Mount Alvernia Campus, and the Millvale Borough parking lot. In 2013, the rain garden in the Borough parking lot won best Community Rain Garden, as determined by the Three Rivers Rain Garden Alliance, and was particularly commended for its interpretive signage and selection of native plants. In partnership with Mount Alvernia and the Millvale Borough, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supported a 400-foot-long bioswale at the campus. Designed to look like a natural creek bed, this bioswale is one of the largest in the country and has significantly helped slow down stormwater runoff.

RESOURCE REGENERATION: Millvale's goal is to be a self-reliant urban solar village and is hard at work to become more energy independent. The Ecodistrict is home to three solarized community buildings: the Millvale Community Library, the Imagine Building, and the Millvale Community Center. A long-term goal for these buildings is to have the ability to go off the grid in case of an emergency, draw power from solar installations throughout the Borough, and set up emergency shelters at these locations.



SOLAR POWER AT MILLVALE COMMUNITY LIBRARY



MOBILE MAKESHOP SESSION AT MILLVALE COMMUNITY LIBRARY



The library emerged as the frontrunner in reducing the community's carbon footprint by becoming fully solar operated. Supported by the Heinz Endowments, the Henry L Hillman Foundation, and Green Mountain Energy, 83 solar panels were installed on top of the Millvale Community Library, generating 25,256 kWh/year of solar energy. Since 2015, the library has generated 100% of its own power. In fact, this solar panel array on the roof is harvesting more power than the library can use. At the end of the year, Duquesne Light, the local utilities company, will pay the library for the surplus. The library plans to reinvest the savings into more programming and full-time staff. Solar programming at the library led the effort to fully solarize the Imagine Building located next door. In 2016, the Millvale Community Library received a grant for \$89,000 from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation. The library gave to the grant to the Borough to finish installing the 98 solar panels on top of the Millvale Community Center.

Supported by Neighborhood Allies, the Allegheny Solar Cooperative was created to democratize solar ownership and provide solar energy for community-based organizations and local businesses. The co-op was inspired by the solar installation at the Millvale Community Library. As the first of its kind in southwestern Pennsylvania, members will pay money to the co-op that will be used to crowdfund solar installations on community buildings. Those businesses and organizations will then enter into a power purchase agreement with the co-op that will let it function as a power company. Profits will be reinvested back into the co-op for additional projects.

LESSONS LEARNED + CONTINUED CHALLENGES

1. Millvale is a small town with limited resources, which can make sustainable district-scale development difficult. However, this made the Founding Organizations work together both internally and externally with partners from around the region to pool resources. It also allowed the community to use their connections in town to push policies, projects, and programs forward. What Millvale lacks in resources, it makes up for with agility and internal connectivity.
2. Learning from the community is a challenge as well as an opportunity. The Founding Organizations want to ensure that Millvale's changes reflect the needs and priorities of the community.
3. One of the biggest lessons learned was that it is best to start small. Millvale was able to complete 70% of its goals from the Pivot Plan 1.0 because community members were able to easily be a part of many of the projects and program. Having projects that residents were able to see, touch, and engage with helped boost community involvement.

NEXT STEPS

1. Create more partnerships outside of Millvale to grow green infrastructure throughout the region. Work with neighboring communities to show them the EcoDistricts approach.
2. Work on how to efficiently share the Ecodistrict's performance and progress with the public.
3. As neighborhood leadership moves through the certification process, EcoDistricts can provide technical support and training, and serve as an information hub to connect the district with others for peer learning and the application of best practices. (2017-2019)



RENDERING OF MILLVALE FOOD HUB



MILLVALE ECODISTRICT PIVOT PLAN 2.0

“Years of hard work by residents, business owners, and other stakeholders have led to the transformational planning and community development efforts that are working to make Millvale a stronger community for all. The EcoDistrict framework has been instrumental in helping the community organize around itself and create one shared to address legacy challenges through innovative, grassroots solutions.”

—ZAHEEN HUSSAIN, MILLVALE SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR

ABOUT ECODISTRICTS

EcoDistricts is nonprofit that advances a new standard for community development. Through its programs and certification standard, EcoDistricts helps create equitable, sustainable, and resilient **neighborhoods for all**.