

## The Environmental Center at Frick Park Project Overview

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy has a public/partnership with the City of Pittsburgh to restore and revitalize the City's parks. The Environmental Center at Frick Park provides an opportunity to strengthen this partnership by building a nationally recognized educational facility that provides outstanding environmental education to all Pittsburghers.

The old Environmental Center burned in 2002 and a community visioning process led to a new mission for the Center. As a theme and mission, *Education through Restoration* is active (programming is outside and hands-on) and purposeful (programming actually helps to restore the local, urban environment). The process also led to a commitment to provide this high quality programming to children and families that often are not exposed to environmental education, which can provide such benefits as improved physical and mental health and increased understanding of scientific principles.

The Environmental Center is within three miles of over 170,000 residents, including those from many of the city's most underserved communities, such as Homewood, Garfield, East Liberty, Hazelwood, Larimer, the Hill District and Lincoln-Lemington. Together, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and the City of Pittsburgh have the opportunity to educate and inspire these future park stewards and environmentally literate citizens by creating a new facility and expanding the high quality programming at the Environmental Center.

This newly envisioned Environmental Center will offer urban environmental education for school groups and summer camps and will be the hub for the Parks Conservancy's volunteer activities and community outreach programs. Significant planning has already been completed, including the development of a business and operations plan, which solidified the mission and direction for the new center and detailed a means to achieve financial stability.

The design for the Environmental Center must successfully integrate innovative educational facilities, both indoor and outdoor, with a public park that is at once a complex ecosystem, historic landscape, and community property. The new Center will include classrooms, a welcome area with restrooms, and learning landscapes, including thirteen outdoor learning spaces. The design will include input from experienced environmental educators as well as from current and potential users. The Conservancy is now ready to begin the design process in preparation for the construction of the new Environmental Center at Frick Park. We anticipate completing design work within 1 year.

Our 2010-2011 programming includes expansion to new audiences:

- High School Urban EcoStewards (YMCA's Lighthouse program at Westinghouse HS, City Charter HS, Science & Technology Academy, and Ellis School);
- Pittsburgh Public Schools Middle Grades Summer Camp (with Carnegie Museums); and
- 1<sup>st</sup> grade Habitat Explorers Program (Faison Elementary, Ellis School, Colfax Elementary (*returning*), and the Environmental Charter School at Frick Park (*returning*)).

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Timeline of Activities

- 2002 Environmental Center gutted by fire  
Sharp reduction in number of visitors served (from 9,000 to approx. 3,500)
- 2004 Initial community visioning process for new Center  
Theme of *Education through Restoration* emerges
- 2005-2007 Community advisory team forms  
Comprehensive survey of local environmental education programs  
Benchmarking visits to other environmental education centers  
Review and recommendations by Association of Nature Center Administrators
- 2008 Detailed business and operations plan completed
- 2009 Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and City of Pittsburgh begin negotiations for management agreement for Center and adjoining 151 acres
- 2010 Pilot program expansion into public, charter, private, and after school programs including the YMCA Lighthouse program at Westinghouse HS in Homewood  
Concept design work begins
- 2011-2012 Schematic designs, design development, and construction  
Ongoing partnership development and program expansion  
4,000-5,000 visitors served annually
- 2013 Environmental Center at Frick Park opens  
Further program expansion to additional schools and after school programs  
7,000 visitors served annually
- 2020 Center is a draw for children and families to learn about the environment, get engaged in outdoor activities, and become lifelong park users and stewards  
20,000 visitors served annually