

College Heights

College Heights is the only State College Borough neighborhood situated north of the Penn State Campus. The neighborhood is comprised of West College Heights and East College Heights and is a vision of high-quality architecture, tree-lined streets, and early 20th century and mid-century modern neighborhood development. West College Heights is located between Atherton Street, Penn State Blue & White Golf Course, and Radio Park Elementary School. East College Heights is situated between Atherton Street, Penn State University Park Campus, the Penn State Arboretum and Sunset Park.

The neighborhood is among the oldest of the Borough's neighborhoods and a substantial portion of the neighborhood a registered National Historic District. Annexations of land that make up the area of the College Heights neighborhood took place from about 1915 to 1931. This land was then

subdivided as the Hartswick, McCormick and College Heights Plots. Given its proximity to campus, the neighborhood has always been attractive to people associated with Penn State University. Much of the historic housing was built between the Borough's incorporation in 1896 and the beginning of World War II in the early 1940s.

The College Heights Association was formed in 1924. According to the College Heights Historic District Walking Tour, the Association described the neighborhood in this way: "Apart from its altitude, it borders the college woods and the golf links, giving to this section a beautiful setting which at the same time is healthful. The Association feels that here is a section that promises to be the garden spot of State College."

The Association has a history of being an active group of residents dedicated to their neighborhood's quality of life. For example, Sunset Park was made possible through the efforts of College Heights residents. The College Heights Association planted the idea of a neighborhood park in 1941. College Heights residents contributed time and money to allow the park to be used temporarily until a door-to-door effort to raise money to purchase the park took place in 1982. Additionally, the Association volunteered to do the landscaping for the developing College Heights School in the early 1930s.

The neighborhood remains today as one of the few Borough neighborhoods that is zoned completely for single-family residences and open space. The neighborhood condition has stayed true to its history as a neighborhood that is attractive to both single-family homes as well as rental properties and has a distinct "garden feel" with the mature trees and well-maintained landscaping.



Neighborhood Characteristics

The population of College Heights according to the 2010 Census was 1,839. This represents 4.4% of the total population of the Borough and a 5% decrease in the neighborhood's population since 1990.

The age of College Heights residents is well-balanced, with each significant age group making up roughly an equal part of the neighborhood's population. The largest percentage of residents fall within the 45-64 age group, with 25.8% of residents. Within 20% of the neighborhood's housing units reside families with children.

Of the neighborhood's 787 Occupied Housing Units, 70% are owner-occupied and 30% are renter-occupied. College Heights is one of few Borough neighborhoods in which more than half of the housing in the neighborhood is maintained as owner-occupied. According to the Borough's Registered Student Home list in December of 2013, there were 78

single-family homes or duplexes with student home permits in the neighborhood. This represents roughly 10% of the occupied housing units in the neighborhood.

Land use has been and is still predominantly single-family, owner-occupied housing with some rentals scattered throughout. Many of these rentals are concentrated in the southeast area of the neighborhood near Park Avenue and along the Atherton Street corridor. However, over time these have become somewhat more scattered through the east and west sides of the neighborhood. Despite a slight decrease in population over the past 20 years, occupied housing units have actually increased by 2% since 1995. (See the Land Use map on page 31 and the Housing Tenure

College Heights by the Numbers

Population (2010)	1,839
% of Borough	4.4%
Age of Residents (2010)	
Under 18	14.1%
18-24	18.4%
25-34	12.9%
35-44	11.6%
45-64	25.8%
65 & up	17.2%
Occupied Housing Units (2010)	787
Owner-Occupied	70%
Renter-Occupied	30%
Increase in Units since 1995	2%
Registered Student Homes (2012)	78



map on page 37.)

According to the Centre Region Planning Agency's Growth Forecast Map for 2009-2040 the neighborhood is essentially built out; only a few opportunities for the construction of new single-family homes on vacant lots were identified. The map also identified an opportunity for the development of a public or institutional use along Park Avenue, which is now home to the Pasquerella Catholic Student Center. Current reuse opportunities include the reuse of the former College Heights School along Atherton Street.

In addition to the Catholic Student Center, there are also a number of churches and buildings used for religious meetings. These are located along Hillcrest Avenue, Ridge Avenue and Glenn Road.

Along Atherton Street, there is a small gas/service station,

the Exxon Station, which has been in operation since 1935, and the former SCASD College Heights School, which was built in 1930. The neighborhood is surrounded by Radio Park Elementary, Penn State University open spaces, including the Blue and White Golf Course and the Arboretum, and Sunset Park which is now operated by the Centre Region parks system. In keeping with its historic roots as the "garden spot of State College," the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources indicated that the neighborhood has the greatest percentage of tree canopy of any of the Borough's neighborhoods. Just over 60% of the neighborhood has mature tree coverage. (See the Community Facilities map on page 41.)

Traffic and transportation have historically had significant impacts on the neighborhood. In the mid-1990's a traffic diverter was installed at the intersection of Hillcrest Avenue and Woodland Drive in East College Heights. For



Neighborhood SWOT Analysis

the most part, this diverter has helped resolve traffic issues within the neighborhood. However, Atherton Street and Park Avenue, which are Pennsylvania Department of Transportation roadways carrying heavy daily traffic volumes, continue to present concerns for residents. These roadways impact the neighborhood in terms of their impacts on neighborhood continuity, safety, and accessibility of bus, bike and pedestrian routes. Parking issues are minimal in the neighborhood. Many streets in East College Heights have been designated as 'No Parking Anytime' zones. In West College Heights, there are some areas that permit 2 Hour parking or Residential Permit parking. (See the [Transportation Systems map on page 39.](#))

Atherton Street and Park Avenue carry heavy volumes of CATA bus traffic. These routes provide connections to campus, downtown, and the commercial and residential areas along North Atherton in Ferguson and Patton Townships. While these routes pass through the neighborhood frequently, there are only a few access points for College Heights residents wishing to use the buses. These are located on Atherton Street at Hillcrest Avenue and on Park Avenue at the Nittany Lion Inn or at the Penn State Childcare Center on North Allen Street.

Several bike routes run through or around the perimeter of the College Heights neighborhood connecting it to Borough amenities as well as recreational bike routes throughout the Centre Region. Bike routes run along Park Avenue connecting to Teaberry Ridge and the Blue Course Drive Bike Path and along McKee Street connecting to campus, downtown and the bike path behind the Penn State Arboretum.

Strengths

College Heights residents expressed much pride in the quality of life in their neighborhood. They felt that the general ambiance and maintenance of the neighborhood make it feel very safe and attracts a diversity of residents. Residents are glad to see many families, elderly that can remain in their homes, and active and involved neighborhood association members. Residents enjoy the close proximity to campus, downtown and other daily amenities. The neighborhood's designation as a National Register Historic District, and the stability of home ownership in the west side were also noted as strengths. Residents indicated that the traffic control measures that have been made have helped to contribute to a decrease in through traffic issues, particularly on the east side of the neighborhood. Residents felt that amenities like the former College Heights School, the Radio Park School, and the historic Exxon Mobile station are positive assets. Other amenities included the trails, bike paths, Sunset Park and the Penn State Golf Course, and the mature trees either in or immediately adjacent to the neighborhood. Due to many natural uses in and around the neighborhood, and limited street lights, the neighborhood does not experience much light pollution.

Weaknesses

College Heights residents indicated that N. Atherton Street can be a barrier, dividing the neighborhood in two and creating problems with pedestrian connectivity, noise and traffic. There were also concerns with the level of traffic and the connectivity across Park Avenue to campus and from Taylor Street to Atherton. Other traffic problems included speeding on Atherton Street, Park, Ridge and Hillcrest Avenues and Martin Terrace and the CATA VE and NE Routes bypassing the neighborhood without providing service to

residents. Residents were concerned about the presence and regulation of student homes and football rentals in terms of the impact on surrounding properties and overall neighborhood cohesion. Residents felt that not knowing where rental units were located and not seeing consistency in zoning and ordinance enforcement were weaknesses experienced in the neighborhood. Other maintenance concerns included maintenance of bicycle paths and ownership of alleys. While proximity to campus was also a strength, it was noted as sometimes being a weakness particularly when it results in petty crimes along N. Allen Street. Areas such as Martin Terrace and Sunset Avenue are not well lit, and overhead power lines create the potential for outages during storms. Finally, the lack of a playground or park space on the west side of the neighborhood and the impact of surrounding development in Ferguson Township were shared as weaknesses.

Opportunities

College Heights residents felt that there were many opportunities for improving the neighborhood. Residents felt that there should be better management of rental housing and football homes, and incentives provided for individuals to “rent-to-own” and to encourage home ownership. Similarly, residents felt that there was an opportunity to look at zoning and development regulations in order to ensure that new homes in the neighborhood are context sensitive. Neighbors felt that there was an opportunity to assess areas where trees conflict with utilities, where sick trees can be replaced more quickly and where additional lighting could be added to make the neighborhood more safe and walkable at night. Some felt that there was an opportunity to work with Penn State on traffic management issues on Park Avenue and the potential use of the PSU Golf Course as a year-round space for public recreation. Preserving recreational amenities



and encouraging the use of the Radio Park Elementary for recreation during non-school hours were noted as opportunities. Other opportunities included looking at the on-street parking regulations and the redevelopment of the College Heights school.

Threats

While some residents expressed the concern that there needs to be more management and regulations of neighborhood conditions, others cautioned that too much regulation could threaten the quality of life in the neighborhood. In general, residents felt that the growing enrollment at Penn State could be a threat as the number of homes being converted to rentals could increase, as well as maintenance and behavior issues if more students moved in to the neighborhood. Some neighbors were concerned with the potential impacts of regional developments, such as Penn State converting the golf course to additional buildings, more developments along North Atherton in Ferguson and Patton Townships, and the future land uses along North Atherton Street once suggested by the State College Land Area Plan. Further threats stated by residents included the traffic volumes and behavior of drivers on Park Avenue and Atherton Street, the secondary impacts of Atherton Street as a state highway, and sign pollution along major roads. Finally, residents felt that any use other than an education use for the former College Heights School could bring negative impacts to the neighborhood.

SWOT at a Glance

- + Ambiance, maintenance, safety, mature trees
- + Proximity to downtown, campus, other amenities
- + Historic district, College Heights School, Exxon, Radio Park
- + Trails, bike paths, Sunset Park, PSU golf course
- + Stability in homeownership, active association members
- Traffic, speeding and connectivity across major roads
- Regulation of student rentals and football homes
- Enforcement of zoning and ordinances
- Proximity to campus results in petty crimes
- Lighting and overhead power lines
- Management of rental and football homes
- Incentives for ownership & context sensitive construction
- Park facilities in West College Heights (or better access)
- College Heights School as educational/neighborhood use
- Lighting, tree and traffic management strategies
- ✗ More conversion of rental properties, maintenance of rentals
- ✗ Appropriate balance of regulations and enforcement
- ✗ Future development on West Campus, Ferguson & Patton Twps
- ✗ Non-educational/neighborhood uses for College Heights School
- ✗ Traffic impacts of North Atherton & Park Avenue