Latham St. commons

Promoter.
Carnegie Mellon University
School of Design,
School of Architecture,
Heinz College of Public Policy

Funder.
Local Foundations,
Crowd-funding

Aknowledgements.
Mark Stucky
Context.
Latham St. Commons is an initiative that addresses the challenges and complexities in rejuvenating a decaying urban structure situated between two socially and economically divided communities. Can a racially, socially, and economically diverse community determine, manage and leverage a shared set of community “common” assets? Is it even possible to build a system where daily life needs are the drivers for new local economies?
The project.

The project site is a nearly vacant set of storage garages on the border of two ethnically and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. Here, the Commons has an opportunity to bridge the racial and social divides that perpetuate blight, poverty, and inequality. The Commons intends to accomplish this prodigious task in measured parts, not unlike the gridded layout of the garage structures themselves. Inspired by the structure’s original partitions, the Commons will feature different program cells, each operating under the intersection of sustainable utilization of physical space, positive community interactions, and enhanced access to nutritious food.
Our framework
September 2014 –

ENGAGE
LOCATE
PRODUCE
INNOVATE

Data Driven Communication Systems

Latham St. Commons
A living lab where daily life needs are the drivers for new economies

New social/ economical/ environmental enterprises

Food Policies, Food Distribution and Food Systems
There are many existing policies that impacted this initiative including compliance with current zoning laws, infrastructure for water, energy, used in ways not previously anticipated, and farm subsidies and other economic incentives/disincentives. Food policies are, and will continue to be, tested by “disruptive” technologies and methods. Latham St. Commons provides an opportunity for policymakers to evaluate, experiment with, and responsibly introduce changes to existing norms and conventional wisdom.
There are many different ways we can design for social interactions and meaningful engagement with the community. But for the purpose of our investigation we will discover the affordances of co-designing with the community alongside relevant data and technology to inspire new types of learning, advocacy and engagement.
Our plan includes utilizing the existing roof surface as a rooftop garden for food production. Working with various stakeholders to understand the necessary physical and organizational infrastructure, and how to develop such a system to be integrative and holistic is key. We feel substantial portions of the facility will not only be off-grid, but also net-positive; producing some of its own heat and fuel requirements and revenue within the community. The garage space beneath should enable food and other enterprises to efficiently produce and exchange goods and services.
City and Environmental Planning

Build learning networks related to regional food supply chain and food justice

Engage local communities in the design and implementation of region food systems
Often missing from these initiatives is a long-term financial sustainability strategy. The presence of new social ventures will encourage community members to spend money within the local economy. The social ventures also provide a self-sustaining financial model and aims to bring healthy food options into the local food system in Pittsburgh, PA.
The Latham St. Commons is an interdisciplinary project between the School of Design and Architecture, and Public Policy programs at Carnegie Mellon University. Designing for such complex and sensitive issues requires collaboration not only between these programs, but also involves interaction, engagement and feedback from the community at every step along the way.
For the long-term, the Latham St. Commons projects to create new opportunities for social ventures into the local economy. Through these opportunities, we hope to create jobs, provide supplemental revenue streams to families involved in the ventures, and add both material and holistic wealth to the community.
Storytelling and Visualisation

Community Listening Stations

Contextual data visualization tools