

# *An Atlas of the Esplen Neighborhood of Pittsburgh 1977*



**ESPLEN**

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# PITTSBURGH NEIGHBORHOOD ATLAS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Pittsburgh Neighborhood Alliance was formed in 1969 by a number of neighborhood organizations that were concerned with improving the city's neighborhoods and their relations with city government. The members of the Alliance recognized that in order to negotiate effectively with city government about such major concerns as public service needs, capital improvements and transportation, it was necessary to obtain accurate, up-to-date information about the neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this information was not available.

To remedy this situation, the Alliance developed its Pittsburgh Neighborhood Atlas project. First, the boundaries of the city's neighborhoods had to be determined. The Pittsburgh Neighborhood Atlas asked people attending community meetings to name and describe the boundaries of the neighborhoods in which they lived. This information was also provided by an Atlas-initiated survey. Responses from every voting district of the city were analyzed to assure citizen involvement at the neighborhood level. Seventy-eight neighborhoods were thus identified, each made up of one or more whole voting districts in order to comply with provisions in Pittsburgh's home rule charter relating to the election of community advisory boards.

The Atlas then gathered a body of useful and up-to-date information for every neighborhood. It is the beginning of a neighborhood information system that more closely reflects neighborhood boundaries as defined by residents instead of by public officials. In the past, statistics about sections of the city have been based on information published for relatively large areas such as census tracts. For the atlas, much of the material describing neighborhood characteristics came from figures compiled for smaller areas: voting districts or census blocks. As a result, detailed information is now available for neighborhoods whose boundaries differ substantially from census tract boundaries.

The information in this atlas provides an insight into current neighborhood conditions and the direction in which the neighborhood is moving. The best indicators showing the health of the neighborhood are provided by citizen satisfaction with the neighborhood, and changes in residential real estate transaction prices. Comparison of these statistics to those for the entire city provide a basis to begin understanding issues of neighborhood stability. In the years to come, as additional data are gathered for each of these indicators, trends will become more obvious.

It is important to recognize that neighborhood change is a complex process and that one indicator by itself may not be useful. Neighborhoods may be healthy regardless of their level of income, and therefore income-related statistics may not be useful guides by themselves. Neighborhoods must be viewed over time in terms of relative changes compared to the city as a whole, and any analysis of neighborhood conditions must focus upon all of the data in order to provide a comprehensive understanding.

To learn about specific sections of the neighborhood, figures by individual voting district or census tract may be obtained. Additional information on the neighborhood or the information system is available through the Center for Urban Research of the University of Pittsburgh, which has made an outstanding contribution to the development of this atlas.

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Esplen is approximately 3.0 miles west of downtown. It is estimated to be 190.0 acres in size, containing 0.6% of the city's land and 0.1% of its 1974 population. The voting district in the neighborhood is #9, Ward 20. (See Appendix for a listing of the neighborhood's census tracts.)



NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY  
ESPLEN

Esplen was named for Henry Esplen, a well respected Scottish immigrant, who came to Temperanceville (now the West End) in 1839.

Esplen administered the Thaddeus Stevens School and served as an elder in the Eighth Presbyterian Church and superintendent of the local Sunday school. Isabella, Esplen's first wife, was a daughter of Pittsburgh's first alderman. His second wife was Maggie Lestie. Esplen died in Greenfield, Missouri in 1909.

Esplen's location was less an act of God than that of man. In 1855, track crews blasting for a railroad along the Ohio jolted part of the crest of a neighboring hill. The land slid halfway down the hill, then settled. Several years later, a few people ventured out onto the nose of ground, building houses, planting trees and laying out gardens. The place became known as Barney's Level, named for one of these settlers. Also settling on the level was yet another Esplen, John, a riverman married to Catherine Woods, the daughter of a steamboat family. This Esplen supervised the steamboat landings at the foot of Elliott Hill and at the mouth of Chartiers Creek.

Most buildings in Esplen went up between 1880 and 1890. By the turn of the century, a number of stores and businesses lined West Carson Street.

Esplen became a borough in 1891, and was annexed to the City of Pittsburgh on January 8, 1906.

ESPLEN

Summary Statistics

	<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Pittsburgh</u>
Population (1974)	713	479,276
% Change (1970-1974)	-28%	-8%
% Black population (1970)	11%	20%
Housing units (1974)	296	166,625
% Vacant	12%	6%
% Owner-occupied housing units (1974)	55%	54%
Average sales price of owner-occupied dwellings (1975)	\$16,533	\$23,518
% Residential real estate transactions with mortgages provided by financial institutions (1975)	57%	59%
Crime rate (1975)	0.065	0.053
Average family income (1969)	\$8,600	\$10,500
Income index as % of city index (1974)	82%	
% Satisfied with neighborhood (1976)	19%	41%
Major neighborhood problems (1976)	Poor roads Burglary Undesirable People	Poor roads Dog litter Burglary

CITIZEN SURVEY

The purpose of the citizen survey was to obtain attitudes about the quality of the neighborhood environment. Citizens were asked to respond to questions concerning the neighborhood as a whole, neighborhood problems, and public services. The attitudinal data, heretofore not available, are key indicators of the relative health of the neighborhood. By specifying neighborhood problems or public service needs, the information may be a useful guide for public investment or service delivery decisions.

The city-wide survey was mailed to a randomly selected sample of registered voters. Of approximately 35,000 households contacted, 9,767 responded. The sample provides a 5% response rate for each of the city's 423 voting districts. (See Appendix for a profile of the respondents as well as for statistics on voter registration.)

I. Neighborhood Satisfaction

Esplen residents are generally less satisfied with their neighborhood than residents city-wide. Table 1 shows that 19% of the citizens responding to the survey were satisfied with their neighborhood compared to 41% in all city neighborhoods. When asked to state whether the neighborhood is better or worse than two years ago, 24% said that it was better which exceeded the city-wide response of 12%. Given the opportunity to move from the neighborhood, 33% said they would continue to live there compared to a response of 45% for the city as a whole. The responses to these satisfaction questions indicate a mixed attitude of residents toward their neighborhood compared to citizens city-wide.

TABLE 1

Neighborhood Satisfaction  
Esplen

Question 1: Generally, how satisfied are you with conditions in this neighborhood?

	<u>Satisfied (%)</u>	<u>Dissatisfied (%)</u>	<u>Neither (%)</u>
Esplen	19	67	14
All neighborhoods	41	37	21

Question 2: Do you think this neighborhood has gotten better or worse over the past two years?

	<u>Better (%)</u>	<u>Worse (%)</u>	<u>Not Changed (%)</u>
Esplen	24	62	14
All neighborhoods	12	49	36

Question 3: If you had your choice of where to live, would you continue living in this neighborhood?

	<u>Yes (%)</u>	<u>No (%)</u>	<u>Not Sure (%)</u>
Esplen	33	48	19
All neighborhoods	45	32	18

SOURCE: Citizen Survey, 1976.

NOTE: The percent responses to each question do not add up to 100%. The difference is accounted for by the following: "don't know", "unable to evaluate" or no answer.

## II. Neighborhood Problems

In order to identify specific neighborhood problems, residents were asked to consider twelve problems usually associated with urban communities and rate them for the neighborhood. Table 2 compares the problem ratings of the respondents from Esplen to those from all city neighborhoods. Areas of particular concern for the neighborhood include burglary, poor roads, and undesirable people moving into the neighborhood.

## III. Satisfaction with Public Services

Table 3 shows the satisfaction of Esplen residents with their public services and compares the responses to data for all city neighborhoods. City-wide, residents are least satisfied with street and alley maintenance. Esplen residents are more satisfied with respect to garbage collection and public transportation, and less satisfied with respect to street and alley maintenance, and condition and cost of housing.

The Citizen Survey also asked the respondents to list the services with which they were the least satisfied and to explain the reasons for their dissatisfaction. Residents from Esplen gave the greatest number of reasons for dissatisfaction to the services listed below. Included is a summary of the major reasons for their dissatisfaction.

1. Street and alley maintenance: Poor maintenance; need for better street repair program; problems with dirty street sidewalks.
2. Parks and Recreation: No recreational facilities close by.
3. Schools: No schools in the neighborhood; inadequate busing to schools.

TABLE 2

Neighborhood Problems  
Esplen

Problem Category	Problem Rating - Percent Response		
	Not a Problem	Minor or Moderate	Big or Very Serious
1. Unsafe streets			
Esplen	19	38	33
All neighborhoods	25	45	21
2. Vandalism			
Esplen	0	57	33
All neighborhoods	13	49	28
3. Rats			
Esplen	24	33	19
All neighborhoods	34	33	12
4. Burglary			
Esplen	10	48	43
All neighborhoods	14	44	29
5. Poor roads			
Esplen	19	19	57
All neighborhoods	17	41	33
6. Trash and litter			
Esplen	19	48	29
All neighborhoods	27	41	24
7. Vacant buildings			
Esplen	33	33	19
All neighborhoods	49	24	13
8. Undesirable people moving into the neighborhood			
Esplen	10	24	43
All neighborhoods	42	28	15
9. Stray dogs			
Esplen	5	48	38
All neighborhoods	25	38	18
10. Dog litter			
Esplen	43	52	0
All neighborhoods	21	38	32

SOURCE: Citizen Survey, 1976

NOTE: The neighborhood percentages do not add up to 100%. The difference is accounted for by the following responses: "don't know", "unable to evaluate" or no answer. The problem categories of alcoholism and drug abuse are not included in the table because the response rates to these questions were low.

TABLE 3

Satisfaction with Public Services  
Esplen

Service	Percent Response		
	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied
1. Parks and Recreation			
Esplen	24	19	24
All neighborhoods	51	15	23
2. Schools			
Esplen	29	5	29
All neighborhoods	46	12	21
3. Street Maintenance			
Esplen	14	19	52
All neighborhoods	32	15	49
4. Alley Maintenance			
Esplen	14	10	56
All neighborhoods	20	13	39
5. Garbage Collection			
Esplen	81	10	10
All neighborhoods	74	10	13
6. Police			
Esplen	48	10	38
All neighborhoods	51	17	23
7. Public Transportation			
Esplen	91	5	5
All neighborhoods	61	11	23
8. Fire Department			
Esplen	76	5	0
All neighborhoods	78	7	3
9. Sewage System			
Esplen	67	5	24
All neighborhoods	63	10	13
10. Condition and Cost of Housing			
Esplen	33	10	44
All neighborhoods	44	17	22

SOURCE: Citizen Survey, 1976.

NOTE: The percent responses to each question do not add up to 100%. The difference is accounted for by the following: "don't know", "unable to evaluate" or no answer. Public health and mental health/retardation services are not included in the table because the response rates to these questions were low.

CRIME RATE

The crime rate for major crimes has increased over the last three years (Table 4). In 1973 the number of major crimes per capita was .038 compared to .065 in 1975. The crime rate in the neighborhood was greater than the city per capita rate of .053 in 1975.

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TABLE 4

Crime Rate: Major Crimes  
Esplen

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Major Crimes Number</u>	<u>Crime Rate</u>	
		<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Pittsburgh</u>
1973	27	.038	.043
1974	29	.041	.047
1975	46	.065	.053

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SOURCE: City of Pittsburgh, Bureau of Police.

NOTE: Major crimes are murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary and theft. The neighborhood crime rate is computed by dividing the number of crimes committed in the neighborhood by its adjusted population for 1974.

THE PEOPLE

Table 5 and Table 6 present data on the characteristics of the neighborhood population and compare them to city-wide statistics.

In 1974, the population of Esplen was estimated to be 713, down by 28% since 1970. This compares to a city-wide population decline of 8% during the same period. Information on the racial composition of the neighborhood is not available for 1974; however, the number of Black households in the neighborhood increased during the decade of the sixties, and the Black population was 10.8% of the neighborhood's population in 1970, compared to 20.2% for the city.

The average household size in the neighborhood was 2.45 persons in 1974, down from 3.12 in 1970. The percentage of the population 65 years and older was 12.6% in 1970, compared to 13.5% for the city as a whole.

TABLE 5

Population and Housing Characteristics, 1970 and 1974  
Esplen

	<u>Neighborhood</u>		<u>Pittsburgh</u>	
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1974</u>
Population				
% Black	10.8%	....	20.2%	....
% 65 years and over	12.6%	....	13.5%	....
Households				
% One-person households	19.4%	30.2%	25.4%	25.5%
% Retired head-of-households	....	38.2%	....	26.3%
% Households with children	....	22.9%	....	32.7%
% Female head-of-household with children	....	5.3%	....	6.4%
% In owner-occupied housing unit	53.9%	55.0%	50.3%	54.2%
% Households changing place of residence within past year	....	29.0%	....	27.0%
Average household size	3.12	2.45	2.82	2.67

SOURCES: U. S. Census (1970) and R. L. Polk & Co. (1974).

NOTE: Dotted lines (....) indicate data unavailable for that year.

The turnover rate of households in the neighborhood exceeds that for all of the city's neighborhoods. During 1973, 29.0% of the households in the neighborhood changed their place of residence compared to a rate of 27.0% for the city. (The figures represent households who have moved within the neighborhood or city as well as those moving into or out of the neighborhood or city.)

Female-headed households with children in 1974 comprised 5.3% of the total households in the neighborhood compared to 6.4% for the city as a whole. In 1974, one-person households consisted of 30.2% of the total households in the neighborhood compared to 25.5% city-wide and to 19.4% for the neighborhood in 1970.

TABLE 6

Neighborhood Change: 1960-1970 and 1970-1974  
Esplen

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>	
		<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Pittsburgh</u>
Population			
1960	1,232		
1970	996	-19	-14
1974	713	-28	- 8
Households <sup>1</sup>			
1960	366		
1970	319	-13	- 6
1974	262	-18	-12
Black Households <sup>2</sup>			
1960	10		
1970	27	+170	+15
1974	(Not available)		
Housing Units			
1960	386		
1970	332	-14	- 3
1974	296	-11	-12

SOURCES: U. S. Census (1960; 1970) and R. L. Polk & Co. (1974).

NOTE: The population figures reported by Polk are adjusted to account for under-reporting. Population includes persons living in institutions and other group quarters, such as nursing homes, dormitories or jails. Differences in the population, household, or housing unit count between 1970 and 1974 are due primarily to changes occurring in the neighborhood. A small percentage of the difference may be accounted for, however, by variations in data gathering techniques. Census statistics were compiled from information provided by all city households answering a standard questionnaire either by mail or interview on or about April 1, 1970. R. L. Polk collected its information by a door-to-door survey carried out over a period of several months. (See Appendix.)

<sup>1</sup>The number of occupied housing units equals the number of households.

<sup>2</sup>Non-white households in 1960.

NEIGHBORHOOD INCOME

The average family income in Esplen was \$8,600, 82% of the city average for the year 1969. R. L. Polk and Company computes an income index for each city census tract. This index, derived from the occupations of heads of households, was used to calculate the income index of the neighborhood. In 1974, the index for Esplen was 82% of the figure for the city as a whole.

Table 7 shows the number of neighborhood households receiving cash grants in 1974, 1975 and 1976 under the public assistance program of the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare. Public assistance in the form of food stamps, Medicaid and various social services are also available to these households, as well as to other households in need. Public assistance payments were made to 30.9% of the neighborhood households in 1976, a higher proportion than for the city overall and an increase since 1974.

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TABLE 7

Public Assistance: Households Receiving Cash Grants  
Esplen

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Neighborhood</u>		<u>Pittsburgh</u>
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1974	74	28.2	16.0
1975	83	31.7	17.2
1976	81	30.9	18.0

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SOURCE: Allegheny County Board of Assistance.

NOTE: The percentages are based on 1974 Polk households. Only households receiving cash grants under Aid to Dependent Children, Aid to Dependent Children-Unemployed Parent; General Assistance, and the State Blind Pension programs are tabulated. The count is of those on assistance as of April 5, 1974, February 28, 1975 and February 27, 1976; households whose grants were terminated between reporting dates are not included.

HOUSING

Table 6 shows that the number of housing units in Esplen decreased during the decade of the sixties and decreased during the period 1970-1974. Of the occupied housing units in the neighborhood, 55.0% were owner-occupied in 1974 compared to a city-wide rate of 54.2%. The vacancy rate in 1974 for the neighborhood was 11.5% which was greater than the city-wide rate.

The average value of owner-occupied housing in the neighborhood was \$7,700 in 1970, compared to a city-wide average of \$14,800.

A housing expenditure greater than 25% of household income is often considered to be excessive and a problem associated with low income households. In 1970, for the city as a whole, less than 1% of renter households earning \$10,000 or more a year spent 25% or more of this income for rent; of those earning less than \$10,000, 43.7% spent 25% or more of their income on rent. In Esplen, 42.3% of renter households in the lower income category paid out 25% or more of their income on rent. These percentages suggest a lack of housing choice for renters with limited incomes, both in the neighborhood and the city.

TABLE 8

Housing Characteristics, 1970 and 1974  
Esplen

	<u>Neighborhood</u>		<u>Pittsburgh</u>	
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1974</u>
Housing units				
% Vacant	3.9	11.5	6.2	6.2
% One-unit structures	67.8	....	52.9	....
Occupied housing units				
% Owner-occupied	53.9	55.0	50.3	54.2
Average value: owner-occupied units <sup>1</sup>	\$7,700	....	\$14,800	....

SOURCES: U. S. Census (1970) and R. L. Polk & Co. (1974).

<sup>1</sup>Average value rounded to nearest one hundred dollars.

REAL ESTATE AND MORTGAGE LOAN TRANSACTIONS

The average sales price of owner-occupied housing was \$16,533 in 1975. (See Table 9) Although the average price was greater than the city-wide average, the implications of this divergence are difficult to judge because of variations in the quality and size of the structures among city neighborhoods. As additional data are obtained, however, the trend in real estate prices for the neighborhood can be compared to the trend for the city as a whole in order to determine relative differences.

In order to evaluate the extent to which private lenders are involved in the neighborhood, the number of mortgage loans made on residential property each year must be divided by the number of residential real estate transactions for that year. The percentage of residential real estate transactions financed through financial institutions was 57% in 1975 in Esplen compared to a city-wide rate of 59%. The implications of the difference between the two rates are difficult to discern because of variations in risk factors and income levels among city neighborhoods. However, as additional data become available, trends in lending activity within the neighborhood compared to other neighborhoods or to the city as a whole can be assessed.

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TABLE 9

Real Estate and Mortgage Loan Statistics  
Esplen

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	<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Pittsburgh</u>
Average sales price: owner-occupied dwellings		
1974	\$12,000	\$21,582
1975	\$16,533	\$23,518
Number of residential mortgages		
1973	3	
1974	2	
1975	6	
% Residential real estate transactions with mortgages provided by financial institutions		
1974	17%	58%
1975	57%	59%

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SOURCE: City of Pittsburgh, Department of City Planning.

APPENDIX

a. Data Sources: Information for the atlas was obtained from the 1960 and 1970 U. S. Census of Population and Housing; R. L. Polk and Company's "Profiles of Change" for Pittsburgh in 1974; Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning and Bureau of Police; the Allegheny County Board of Assistance and Department of Elections and Voter Registration; Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission; and the Citizen Survey conducted by the Pittsburgh Neighborhood Atlas.

b. Neighborhood Census Tract: 2001

c. Methodology: The neighborhood boundaries were determined on the basis of whole voting districts. However, census tracts do not usually correspond exactly with voting district boundaries, and simplifications were made where necessary to facilitate data collection efforts.

The opinions and characteristics of survey respondents, as well as voter registration, were recorded by voting district and then compiled for Esplen by the Pittsburgh Neighborhood Atlas in conjunction with the Center for Urban Research, University of Pittsburgh. All other statistics tabulated for the neighborhood were compiled from data available by census tract.

To compensate for under-reporting, the 1974 figure for the neighborhood population has been increased by 1.11, a factor that was derived from the U. S. Bureau of the Census 1973 population estimate for Pittsburgh. An additional adjustment has been made where applicable, since Polk and Co. does not count persons living in institutions or other group quarters. To arrive at the total estimated population for 1974, the neighborhood population was further increased by adding the number of persons in group quarters for the neighborhood according to the 1970 Census.

d. Characteristics of the Sample: In Esplen, 21 citizens answered the questionnaire. Based on the number of replies to each question, the characteristics of respondents can be generally described as follows: an average age of 46; 38% female; 10% Black; 84% with at least four years of high school education; 75% homeowners; and an average of 29 years in the neighborhood. The median household income falls in the range of \$7,000 to \$9,999; the average household size is 3.26 persons; and 68% of the households have no members under 18 years old living in the home.

The total sample (all respondents to the survey) was over-represented by homeowners (68% compared to 50% for Pittsburgh in 1970) and under-represented by Blacks (14% compared to a city Black population of 20% in 1970).

e. Voter Registration: In November, 1976, 433 residents of the neighborhood were registered to vote, a decrease of 17 (-3.8%) since November, 1975. In this period, city registration increased by 1.3% to 233,028 persons.