

CITY & REGION

Murphy backs Schenley Plaza

By Ellen James
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

The transformation of an Oakland parking lot into the centerpiece of the neighborhood's varied intellectual interests was formally backed Wednesday by Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy.

The proposal unveiled in Schenley Plaza — with an estimated price tag of \$6.5 million — would eliminate the 278-space parking lot in the plaza and add trees, lawns, flowers, "first-class" concessions, loose chairs and tables, welcoming lighting and self-cleaning restrooms.

Officials hope the plan will help meld Oakland's educational, cultural, medical and technological communities.

Representatives of the city planning and parking authorities, the University of Pittsburgh, the Oakland Task Force and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy joined Murphy in making the announcement.

"Oakland is in motion," said Paul Tellers, a member of the Oakland Task Force and Carnegie Mellon University architect. "It is the place to learn, research, work and play, but the town center will bring all of that together."

The city of Pittsburgh will join with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and other local groups in turning the plaza into a public space with gardens, performances and artwork that would be supported by the daily traffic of the nearby universities' students, faculty and staff and tourists. The parking lot sits between Carnegie Library and Hillman

Schenley Plaza originally was designed to be the grand entrance into Schenley Park from Oakland, not a surface parking lot.

While finding parking in Oakland can be troublesome, Ralph Horgan, director of the Pittsburgh Parking Authority, said the gain of a new public space is worth the loss of parking spaces.

"The parking lot takes less than two percent of the total parking in Oakland," he said. "We will be working with the Oakland Task Force to make up the spaces being lost."

"But it is patently obvious that we have to move forward for the greater good of the neighborhood."

The parking authority makes about \$675,000 annually from the parking lot.

Murphy said the city will work with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and the Oakland Task Force to raise money for the plan. Although a project designer has not been chosen, construction could begin by the fall of 2003.

The plan to transform the parking lot was drafted by New York City-based BRV Corp., the same firm that helped transform Manhattan's Bryant Park from a drug haven into a popular spot for outdoor lunches and entertainment.