

Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

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Report to the Members Annual Membership Meeting October 23, 2017

The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation will celebrate 42 years in existence next month, and while there is much that the BGC can report on that highlights a lot of positive change and new opportunities for residents and their children, there is also some anxiousness over events transpiring on the political front here and elsewhere.

The state Legislature is trying to come to terms with funding the Commonwealth's \$32 billion budget. The wrangling in Harrisburg has gone on for months, jeopardizing the welfare of hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians, including students at our state-related universities (Pitt, Penn State, Temple and Lincoln). Hundreds of social programs that channel support of one form or another to young and old Pennsylvanians could be cut severely if the state ultimately fails to pass a revenue plan. And any hope that there could be more resources to support the efforts of community development groups like the BGC has died a quite death, even after intensive lobbying of state lawmakers over the summer. But let's hope a revenue deal gets done soon, as flawed as it's likely to be.

In Pittsburgh, City Council has been slow in identifying a revenue source for a newly-authorized Housing Opportunity Fund (HOF), indicating a true reluctance to shoulder more of the burden addressing the housing crisis that's engulfing greater numbers of low-income tenants and even homeowners. It seems finding a decent, 3-bedroom rental in the East End for under \$1,000/month has become almost impossible. The use of an increase in what is now a 4% realty transfer tax to put the necessary money in the HOF still lacks the five votes on Council to make it a reality.

So the city finds itself between a rock and a hard place, wanting to avoid more displacement of poorer residents in the years to come, but lacking the resolve to ask more affluent residents to help retain and generate more affordably-priced housing. With the state of affairs as it is in Harrisburg and Washington, it's obvious to many Pittsburghers that there is no longer a cavalry riding in from those places to rescue poorer households from being squeezed out. If one earns less than \$30,000/year, there is no long-term guarantee that remaining a Pittsburgher is possible. Help will have to come from elsewhere if working-class folks are to be part of the city's future.

Against this darkening backdrop, the BGC can still point with pride to a number of accomplishments it's had in the past year. There are many others with whom to share the credit, and they are listed at the end of this report.

Youth Development & Education

The BGC is still on the front lines of addressing the needs of children and teens in obtaining a good education, workplace skills, health care services, and opportunities for career and social development. With over 1,800 youths populating Garfield and the neighborhoods surrounding it, the BGC has a number of initiatives aimed at helping hundreds of kids realize their full potential and take advantage of the many opportunities awaiting them in the world outside their neighborhood.

Under a contract with another nonprofit in Garfield, the Neighborhood Learning Alliance (NLA), the BGC managed after-school programs for over 100 students at three city schools (Woolslair, Arsenal K-5 and Arsenal Middle). Each program offers the student help with their homework, structured recreation time, and service projects that help them relate to other aspects of life in their community. In the summer, upwards of 35 children attended an 8-week camp at the BGC's Community Activity Center that continued The BGC also took part in the United Way's "Summer Dreamers" program that blended academics and lessons in swimming and water polo for 40 city elementary- school students.

The BGC drew 179 seniors from city high schools like University Preparatory Academy and Obama International Academy into its College and Career Readiness Program (CCRP), funded under a contract with Partner4Work, the principal workforce development agency in Allegheny County. The CCRP assisted students in getting their diplomas, filling out applications to various colleges or training programs, and qualifying for scholarships from the Pittsburgh Promise and other sources. Over 100 of the participants seniors had moved on to college or a post-secondary career by the end of September. The BGC hopes to attract another 110 seniors from the city's high schools to be part of the 2017-18 program. And another 22 students, many of them participants in the CCRP, were able to enroll at Carlow College this past summer for a course for which they received genuine academic credit.

West Penn Hospital and other employers in the area have stepped up in taking students from the CCRP into their workplaces, thanks to paid internships funded by Partner4Work (formerly the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board). The BGC also placed students at Tech Shop in East Liberty during the last school year, giving them the chance to discover what the world of "makers" is all about.

The summer was an equally busy time again as the BGC placed 160 high school students in 6-week internships with area employers, thanks to a contract with Partner4Work, using funds provided by the City of Pittsburgh. Another 50 high school students found themselves at our Community Activity Center for 6 weeks, using on-line learning modules to recover lost classroom credits. And thirty-five

disadvantaged kids enjoyed a summer academic camp at Arsenal K-5 Elementary School, thanks to funding from the Neighborhood Learning Alliance.

A long-running partnership with UPMC's St Margaret Family Health Center on Penn Avenue continues to pay dividends for city schoolchildren. Close to 200 students at five different elementary schools in the East End received free screenings, diagnostic services, wellness education, and sexual awareness training.

And the BGC will be engaged in helping the Environmental Charter School plan the move of its middle school from Regent Square to the former Rogers School in Garfield by September 2019.

Housing Development

This past year saw work completed on the construction of 19 new, affordable homes under a second phase second phase of the "Garfield Glen" rental development. The homes, on scattered sites across an eight square-block area, were leased to families earning up to \$42,000 annually. The BGC was aided in the project by its partner, S & A Homes, and by the team of Lami-Grubb Architects and Mistick Construction. This brings to 64 the number of rental houses built by the partnership since 2013.

The BGC and S &A submitted a package this month to the PA Housing Finance Agency to build another 20 scattered-site homes in Garfield by the fall of 2019. To be known as "Garfield Highlands", it would require assembling 31 vacant lots and structures that are contributing to blighted conditions on streets east of N. Atlantic Ave. As with the Garfield Glen developments, all of the 2- and 3-bedroom homes would feature rents affordable to working-class families. A decision by PHFA on the application will be forthcoming in March.

Finding ways to renovate vacant homes, or build new ones, that people can afford to own is another challenge the BGC is working on. It is putting \$110,000 into renovating a 2-bedroom house at 4827 Broad Street, which it will sell for under \$150,000 when finished. It is going to make some structural repairs to a vacant rowhouse at 5213 Gem Way, and then will sell the 2-bedroom unit for a price under \$50,000, if possible. It has retained Rob Pfaffmann, a Downtown architect, to design a new single-family house for several lots on Hillcrest St., each of which would feature a small apartment (known as an "ADU" or accessory dwelling unit) on the ground floor of the house that the homeowner can rent. And the BGC recently took title from the city to a vacant house at 233 N. Aiken Avenue, and will look to put it into the hands of a future homeowner so he/she can renovate it.

Another non-profit agency, the Pittsburgh Housing Development Corp., is completing renovation work this fall to a 3-story house at 227 N. Fairmount St. and will it sell it to an owner-occupant when done. Technique Architectural Products, an East End design/build firm, is working to build two new homes with the BGC on vacant land in the 5100 block of Rosetta St. sometime in 2019. The units would sit on piers above ground, with all-glass fronts facing out over the neighborhood.

And a troubled 10-unit row complex in the 400 block of N. Aiken Avenue will likely be the focus of a joint effort with East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) to renovate the property, either as a mixed-income rental or affordable homeownership project. ELDI is attempting to round together the financing to acquire it from its current out-of-state owners.

Penn Avenue Revitalization

The second phase of rebuilding the infrastructure along Penn Avenue has entered the planning stage, with an engineering firm now under contract to the city to prepare drawings that will go out for bid in late 2018/early 2019. This project will cover the stretch from Evaline Street to Graham Street, and is targeted for an early 2020 ground-breaking. Mayor Bill Peduto will have the final say on the specifications and parameters of the work to be done. In the meantime, the BGC is pressing to see that hard lessons learned from the mistakes committed during Phase I are built into the requirements for project management under phase two.

The BGC was pleased with the outcome of an appeal to the state's Commonwealth Court, whose three-judge panel overturned a Common Pleas Court decision reversing the denial by the city Zoning Board of the variances sought by a developer so an one-story concrete block building could be built at the intersection of Penn and S. Negley Aves. The building was to be the site of a new AutoZone retail store, where the Babyland business once operated. The BGC joined with community groups in Friendship and Highland Park in opposing the Common Pleas ruling.

Our staff still works with business owners, both existing and prospective, to find ways to re-invest in the Penn Avenue corridor. Help is available in locating suitable space, securing financing, dealing with occupancy requirements, and finding solutions to other issues that could be hampering their operations. The BGC has also been a fiscal sponsor for Café Con Leche, a pop-up cultural project of Tara Sherry-Torres, BOOM Concepts at 5139 Penn, and LevelUp Studios at 4836 Penn.

Efforts to add more greenery along the commercial district continue. The BGC worked with business owners to place over 30 flowerpots in front of their premises, and to help keep graffiti and the posting of flyers off of the new light poles and traffic signal boxes that were installed under phase one of Penn Avenue's reconstruction.

And, finally, the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative continues to host a year-round First Friday event, *Unblurred*, that invites the public each month to tour many of the arts' venues in the district, and enjoy the vendors' Night Market that runs from May to September. A Website, pennavenue.org, exists to promote these and many other initiatives aimed at forging a distinctive identity for the Penn Avenue corridor.

Public Safety & the Environment

The BGC convened 11 monthly meetings of its task force committed to improving public safety in the Garfield-Friendship-Penn Avenue area. Its

membership includes representatives from the city police, city building inspection, the county health department, juvenile and adult probation agencies, the courts, and the district attorney's office. Of late, it has been focused on the renewal of gang activity in the upper reaches of Garfield that is believed to have helped account for at least one homicide in the neighborhood in each of the past 5 years.

As new restaurants come to the commercial district, BGC staff work with nearby neighbors to put MOU's in place with those establishments intending to sell liquor. The MOU's ensure their operations will not detract from the peaceful, quiet enjoyment to which neighbors are entitled. Most recently, MOU's were executed with the owners of new establishments coming to 5128 Penn and 5349 Penn Avenue.

The BGC also reviews a list of vacant, deteriorated houses each year with the city's Department of Permits, Inspections, and Licenses to assess those which may invite condemnation and eventual demolition by the city. It is also moving aggressively to earmark as many tax-delinquent, vacant parcels of land as possible for public taking by city and earmark them for a reserve for future development that takes its cur from the Garfield 2030 housing and land use plan.

A group of residents calling themselves "Garfield Greens" has taken over the piloting of a potential "green zone" initiative across the upper part of Garfield, one element of which would expand upon the existing Fort Pitt Park next to Fort Pitt School. One hundred surveys of neighborhood residents have been gathered and will hopefully give the group the platform it needs to create spaces dedicated for all to enjoy. The city planning department is standing by should the community decide it wants to move ahead with a master plan for the zone.

The BGC is also helping Garfield Community Farm with its acquisition of a dozen land parcels coming through the city's Vacant Property Reserve. The farm has only been able to lease them up until this point.

The Bulletin & Other Communications

One of the longest-standing projects at the BGC is the publication and distribution of a community newspaper that keeps residents and others informed on what is happening in this part of the city. Feature articles in *The Bulletin* give readers an inside look at both the positive and negative events and developments in Garfield, Friendship, Lawrenceville, East Liberty and Bloomfield, and profiles the people shaping the change process in each of these neighborhoods. The paper has developed a loyal base of advertisers in the larger community who contribute over \$45,000 in revenue each year to its publication.

In addition to the newspaper, the BGC maintains a website, www.bloomfield-garfield.org, together with a blog, a Facebook page and Twitter account, that help the public at-large communicate and connect with us, and define a role they can play in making the neighborhood more safe and livable.

Support to Other Organizations & “Neighbors in Need”

The BGC lends its staff time and use of its facilities to, and sometimes shares financial resources with, other non-profit groups whose missions clearly dovetail with our own. Among these are the Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center (ENEC), NeighborWorks of Western PA, the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group, the Lawrenceville Corporation, and Lawrenceville United. As an example of the fruits of such collaborations, the ENEC helped place 351 city residents in full- or part-time jobs between July of 2015 and March of 2017. The two Lawrenceville groups were able to sustain a community gardening program, provide outreach to seniors in their homes, and run a summer youth employment program, thanks to a \$25,000 operating grant provided by the BGC.

The BGC also hosts the operation of “Neighbors in Need”, a fund raised by East End residents to help individuals and families in a serious financial crisis, or those who lack the funds for a significant need tied to their education, employment, or transportation to work. Thus far in 2017, grants have been made to 38 individuals, totaling a little over \$24,000..

Acknowledgement of Those Who Make Our Work Possible

Almost 70% of our core operating budget is derived from private grants and donations, without which none of the above would be possible. Many of the programs require corporate and/or philanthropic support for their very survival. This is the time of year we also like to thank all of our supporters for their contributions, both large and small, as well as our various partners for providing the funds or technical expertise vital to sustaining our events, various programs and development projects, and those for whom the BGC serves as a fiscal agent.

The Heinz Endowments (for Boom Concepts and LevelUp Studios)
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West Penn Hospital and the Allegheny Health Network
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The ACCBO Fund at the Dept. of City Planning
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