

# **Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation**

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## **Report to the Members Annual Membership Meeting October 27, 2014**

Looking back to the annual report that was delivered to the BGC's members at the 2006 annual meeting, it's worth pausing to consider where the community stood at that time.

An 11-story hi-rise for the elderly in Garfield Heights, built in the mid-1960's, had already been demolished, and we were celebrating the opening of the Penn Fairmont Apartments, with 60 new apartments for seniors, in its place. The 330 units of family housing in Garfield Heights were still in place, not yet gone. But the city Housing Authority had already identified a Columbus firm, KBK Enterprises, to replace them with up to 225 units of mixed-income housing.

Children's Hospital was still under construction at its new site further down Penn. The Children's Home of Pittsburgh, in the 5300 block, was in the midst of building its new facility, too. Fort Pitt School, a newly-christened "accelerated leaning academy", was still open on Hillcrest Street in Garfield. So was Rogers Middle School for the creative and performing arts on Black Street.

St. Lawrence O'Toole Catholic Church still had its own pastor and identity.

The federal "Weed 'N Seed" program, intended to help root out crime in the inner-city and support alternative programming for kids, was still making grants.

Wireless Neighborhoods, the predecessor to Neighborhood Learning Alliance, was building its capacity to support after-school programs across the city.

Mayor Luke Ravenstahl had ascended to the Mayor's office three months earlier. He would later uphold the city's commitment to re-doing the aged infrastructure within the Penn Avenue right-of-way.

None of the following had opened on Penn Avenue: Salt of the Earth, Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, Most Wanted Fine Art, Assemble, Verde's Restaurant, BFG Café, Voluto's, Yoga Hive, Grow Pittsburgh, Irma Freeman Center, Los Sabrosos Dance,

PULSE, the Glass Lofts, the Roboto Project, BUNKER Projects, Center for Post-Natural History, Plumb Media, Tree Pittsburgh, Aahmani African Braids, ARTica, Daily Bread, Neighborhood Learning Alliance, Spak Bros., and That's Sharp Boutique. We're sure we've missed a few as well.

Tonight is the night when we celebrate the successes and acknowledge the shortcomings of the past year. It's also the time when the Board of Directors takes a bow for all of the hours spent overseeing the work of staff, and for representing the interests of our membership in responding to the problems that arise every week in the Garfield, Bloomfield and Friendship neighborhoods.

### ***Youth Development***

The BGC remains one of the city's most active community groups in focusing on the education, employment, health care, and social development of children and teenagers in the community. With over 2,000 kids living in Garfield, Friendship and Bloomfield, there is a lot of ground to cover, obviously.

Under contracts with Neighborhood Learning Alliance (NLA) and the City of Pittsburgh, we were able to afford 59 students at several city high schools the chance to work part-time, while participating in an after-school program to keep them on track to graduate and train them in Microsoft and other workplace credentials. Over 80 students at Obama Academy and several other high schools received help from volunteers recruited by the BGC and NLA to recover lost classroom credits.

West Penn Hospital and other employers continued to accept a number of our young people already finished with high school through city-funded work placements, with the opportunity to become permanent employees after completing their 4-month internships.

Under a second contract with NLA, we engaged 75 children in after-school programs at Arsenal K-5 in Lawrenceville, Woolslair Elementary in Bloomfield, and the Montessori School in Friendship. Many of these same youngsters also benefited from a 6-week summer day camp at our own Activity Center.

The summer was an equally busy time for high schoolers, with 70 teens placed by the BGC in jobs with area employers, thanks to funding from the City of Pittsburgh. And the BGC contracted with the city school district to run a swim and water polo camp for over 130 youngsters in conjunction with their "Summer Dreamers" Program.

A long-running partnership with UPMC's Family Health Center on Penn Avenue continued to pay dividends for city schoolchildren. Several hundred students at five different schools in the East End received free screenings and diagnostic services, together with wellness education and sexual awareness training. The BGC was also a fiscal sponsor for a summer arts program for kids at the Irma Freeman

Center.

Our Activity Center on N. Pacific Avenue was the scene again in December for a holiday visit from Santa with several hundred children from the community, and remained a frequent venue for birthday parties and other family-related events.

### ***Housing Development***

The past year saw commitments from the city and state to make new affordable housing available in the community. A second phase of the Garfield Glen rental development received an allocation of tax credits from the PA Housing Finance Agency. Those tax credits will be used by S & A Homes and the BGC to help build 19 houses on Kincaid, Broad and Dearborn Streets in Garfield. Families earning up to \$35,000 annually will be able to rent them upon completion of construction next fall.

A ground-breaking will occur in December on a 39-unit apartment building at the corner of Penn Avenue and S. Mathilda Street. This development, a partnership between another nonprofit, ACTION Housing, and the BGC, received an allocation of federal tax credits from the PA Housing Finance Agency that will allow the rents to be below-market. One and two-bedroom apartments will be offered to tenants earning up to \$30,000 annually. The BGC will be responsible for leasing and managing four new commercial storefronts on the ground floor of the building.

The “tiny” house phenomenon could be coming to Garfield as early as this winter. A non-profit developer, cityLab of Pittsburgh, plans to erect a 340-square foot house on a thin tract of land in the 200 block of N. Atlantic Avenue. If successful, it’s possible another 8 to 10 homes could be built elsewhere in Garfield over the next 12 to 18 months. Eve Picker, the founder of cityLab, may undertake the larger project through a real estate crowdfunding platform known as “smallchange.com”. She has asked the BGC for help in securing a number of city-owned lots and a portion of the financing for the project.

The BGC continues to take vacant, tax delinquent houses through the city’s title-clearing process. Homes in the 4900 and 5100 block of Dearborn Street, and one in the 5200 block of Gem Way, have been designated for taking by the City. Once they clear this court-supervised process, the city can sell them to the BGC. The BGC would then sell the homes to individuals seeking to buy them as owner-occupants.

Efforts to acquire the former Rogers Middle School on Black St. and convert it into apartments have run into a few hurdles. Although the BGC placed a bid on the property in March, at least one other firm is also seeking to buy the property. The BGC has discussed plans with neighborhood stakeholders to convert the building into affordably-priced apartments. A decision by the Pittsburgh school district on whom to sell the building to should be forthcoming in November.

## ***Penn Avenue Revitalization***

The greatest setback of the past year has been the problems that have plagued the reconstruction of the Penn Avenue right-of-way between Mathilda St. and Pacific Ave. What was originally intended to be a 16-month project is now likely to stretch beyond 22 months. Many of the conditions beneath the old roadway were not sufficiently detailed when the construction contract was awarded by the city in the spring of 2013. The BGC has worked to overcome some of the tensions that have developed between the city and contractor over this issue, along with advancing the schedule for completing the work on the roadway itself, and getting PWSA to respond to the numerous water leaks discovered in their lines. In September, the BGC launched an emergency loan fund to help some of the business owners hurt by the lack of parking and easy access to their premises. It is now working on a possible crowdfunding and on-line video campaign to engage the public in supporting the affected businesses.

A triumph of sorts occurred this month when the city zoning board rejected efforts by a prominent local developer to build a concrete box-like structure at the intersection of Penn and S. Negley Aves. Once home to the “Babyland” business, the developer wants to bring an AutoZone outlet to the site, but in a building with little connection to either Penn or Negley Ave. The BGC and Friendship Community Group rallied organizations from East Liberty and Highland Park in opposing the variances that the developer sought from the zoning board for his project. If the developer appeals the board’s decision, it will set the stage for another showdown on the proposed development in front of Common Pleas Court.

Our staff works with entrepreneurs in the Penn Avenue corridor to find space, financing, marketing help, and other technical assistance to begin or expand their operations. One example has been the BGC’s support to BOOM Concepts in coming into a vacant storefront at 5139 Penn Avenue. It also worked out a memorandum of understanding with the owners of a proposed lounge at 4907 Penn, to be known as Mixtape, so that its operation complements the community around it. And it is helping to sponsor a pop-up restaurant, Café Con Leche, at several storefront locations along the avenue.

The BGC is also helping several building owners with façade facelifts. Toro’s Tavern at 5128 Penn and the Grocery Kart at 5482 are recent beneficiaries of the program. Similar improvements are planned for buildings at 4923, 5120, and 5152 Penn.

## ***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 members

include representatives from the city police, city building inspection, several county agencies, the courts, and the district attorney's office. The BGC also reviews a list of abandoned houses each year with the city's Bureau of Building Inspection to determine which should be condemned and eventually demolished.

The Western PA Conservancy will be working with the Garfield community for the first time over the next six months to examine the potential for a dedicated greenway in Garfield. An area north of Rosetta Street and east of N. Wiinebiddle Street will be the initial focus of a study and, hopefully, an implementation plan that will create a unique amenity for the neighborhood.

### ***The Bulletin & Other Communications***

One of the longest-running traditions 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 aspects of living in Garfield, Friendship, Lawrenceville, and Bloomfield, and the people shaping events in each of these neighborhoods. The paper has developed a loyal base of advertisers in the larger community who contribute over \$40,000 in revenues each year to its publication. This summer, we welcomed a new Communications and Marketing Manager, Sarah Burke, who takes over the paper's editorial duties, and said goodbye to one of our longest-enduring editors, Paula Martinac.

In addition to the newspaper, the BGC maintains two Websites, [bloomfield-garfield.org](http://bloomfield-garfield.org) and [pennavenue.org](http://pennavenue.org), together with a blog, that help the public understand what it is we're trying to do in the community and the role they can play in that effort.

### ***Support for Work of Other Organizations***

The BGC lends its staff time and 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, Lawrenceville United, and the Neighborhood Learning Alliance. As an example of the value of these collaborations, the ENEC helped over 240 city residents find full- or part-time jobs between July of 2013 and this past June.

### ***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. Finally, we depend on lenders such as PNC, WesBanco, Landmarks Community Capital, and the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority, together with the PA Housing Finance Agency, for much of the critical financing needed to do the "bricks-n-mortar" projects. This is the time of year that we like to thank all of these supporters for their contributions, or for partnering with us on our various programs.

The Heinz Endowments  
Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board  
WesBanco Bank  
Dollar Bank  
Allegheny Valley Bank  
Neighborhood Learning Alliance  
BNY Mellon Foundation (for the Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center)  
PNC Bank  
PNC Foundation  
Bridgeway Capital  
Neighborhood Allies  
McCune Foundation  
Sprout Fund  
United Way of Allegheny County  
West Penn Hospital  
UPMC/St. Margaret's Family Health Center  
The ACCBO Fund at the Dept. of City Planning  
City of Pittsburgh – Personnel Employment & Training Division  
State Representative Dom Costa  
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and

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