

Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

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Report to the Members

Annual Election of Board of Directors

October 28, 2019

The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation will celebrate 44 years in existence next month, and there is much that the BGC can point to that represents positive change and new opportunities for residents and their children living in the Garfield and surrounding neighborhoods.

Two years ago, the state Legislature was still trying to come to terms with funding the Commonwealth's \$32 billion annual budget, well past the normal June 30th deadline. The wrangling in Harrisburg went on for months, jeopardizing the welfare of hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians. Hundreds of social programs that channel support of one form or another to young and old Pennsylvanians alike stood to be cut severely if the state ultimately failed to pass a revenue plan. A deal finally got done, but not before state operations and programs got pushed to the edge of the cliff.

Two years ago, Pittsburgh City Council had taken the better part of the year trying to identify a revenue source for a newly-authorized "Housing Opportunity Fund". A number of its members were reluctant to have the City shoulder more of the burden in addressing the shortage of decent, affordable that's confronting thousands of working-class tenants and would-be homebuyers. Finding a decent, 3-bedroom rental in the East End for less than \$1,200/month has become almost impossible. Council finally mustered the votes in December of 2017 to approve a one-half percent increase in the city's share of the deed transfer tax, which now means almost \$10 million is available each year to meet these challenges.

Today, a new set of problems confronts communities like Garfield, Bloomfield, and Friendship. Residents and other stakeholders have decisions to make. Is their future to include people of diverse incomes and racial or ethnic

backgrounds? How do they influence what gets built or renovated? What other amenities are needed to improve the quality of life within them?

Youth Education & Employment

The BGC is still at the forefront of addressing the needs of children and teens in obtaining a good education and workplace skills, and helping them seize on opportunities for career and social advancement. With over 1,500 youths under the age of 18 populating Garfield and the neighborhoods around it, the BGC has a number of initiatives aimed at helping hundreds of kids realize their full potential and become valued members of society in the process.

The BGC attracted 85 seniors last fall from city high schools like University Preparatory Academy, Westinghouse, 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 assist students in getting their high-school diplomas, filling out applications to various colleges or training programs, and qualifying for scholarships from the Pittsburgh Promise and other sources. Over 65 of this past year's participants graduated from the program in June, and moved on to college or a career training program by mid-September.

The BGC is looking to attract another 42 seniors from the city's high schools to be part of the 2019-20 program. And it will be working with the Neighborhood Learning Alliance, also in Garfield, to give many of them their first exposure to college-level classes at CCAC this winter or Carlow College next summer. West Penn Hospital and other employers in the area will step up once again and take students from the CCRP into their workplaces, thanks to internships funded by Partner4Work, the main workforce development agency in the region.

The summer was an equally busy time again as the BGC placed nearly 100 high school students in 6-week internships with area employers, thanks again to a contract with Partner4Work. using federal funds channeled through the City of Pittsburgh.

A long-running partnership with UPMC-St Margaret's Family Health Center on Penn Avenue continues to pay dividends for city schoolchildren. Over 120 students at five different elementary schools in the East End received free screenings, diagnostic

services, wellness education, and sexual awareness training during the 2018-19 school year.

And the BGC welcomed the Environmental Charter School to Garfield as they opened an expanded program for 300 middle-schoolers in the former Rogers School on Columbo Street. Over 150 of the school's students hail from the 15206 zip code.

Housing Development

This past year saw the BGC and its partner, Gatesburg Road Development, re-submit an application to the PA Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to build another 25 scattered-site homes in Garfield, beginning in 2019. To be known as "Garfield Highlands", it has involved 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 new, 2- and 3-bedroom homes would feature rents affordable to working-class families. However, the PHFA elected not to allocate tax credits for the project, even though the agency said the application scored very well. The project will be re-submitted for a third time this November.

For 36 years, the BGC has found ways to renovate vacant homes, or build new ones. It will spend a total of \$150,000 this winter completing renovations to a 2-story rowhouse at 5213 Gem Way that was collapsing in on itself when the BGC bought it in 2016 from the city for \$1,000. It will sell the home to a first-time buyer for \$144,000 when finished, and the URA should be able to offer a second-mortgage, deferred payment loan of up to \$40,000 to an eligible buyer. The BGC also has plans in 2020 to renovate a 3-bedroom house at 5219 Columbo Street once the city agrees to vacate a portion of public right-of-way that cuts through the rear yard of the property.

The construction of a 2-bedroom modular home on Black Street will mark the first new home to be built by the BGC after it completed 48 new homes in Garfield between 2002 and 2014. Its partner, Module Development LLC, has raised over \$30,000 in donations of materials from various suppliers, like Lowe's, in order to reduce costs. The house will sell for \$189,000, and feature a second-mortgage, deferred-payment loan of up to \$50,000 for an eligible buyer. Module and the BGC are looking at the build at least 3 more homes together in Garfield by 2022.

In 2017, the BGC began an initiative to allow for the construction or renovation of single-family homes in Garfield that feature a second unit that can be rented by the owner. Known as “accessory dwelling units” or “ADU’s”, they can help reduce the monthly cost to the homeowner. The Henry Hillman Foundation awarded the BGC a grant of \$210,000 in October to help make feasible the construction of three houses on Hillcrest St. in Garfield, each of which will have a second unit on the ground floor.

Another non-profit agency, East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI), is also active in Garfield creating homeownership opportunities for working-class families. ELDI has raised over \$1.2 million in connection with the renovation of seven, long-vacant houses, and will collaborate with the BGC and Open Hand Ministries, another Garfield organization, in identifying and qualifying first-time homebuyers for the units as they near completion.

And a 16-unit apartment building that the BGC was instrumental in renovating in 1992 at 5456 Penn Avenue will undergo a second rehabilitation in 2020. The new land trust organization in Garfield will join the BGC as a co-owner of the building in making over \$400,000 in repairs and improvements to the Montana Apartments, using a combination of bank financing and U.R.A. funding. This will enable the building to remain affordable for the long term to tenants earning less than \$36,000 annually.

Penn Avenue Revitalization

The second phase of rebuilding the roadway and adjoining infrastructure along Penn Avenue is now into the design and engineering phase. The project, which will also include new sidewalks, street lighting, pedestrian crossings and landscaped beds, should be ready for bid by late 2020 or early 2021. It will cover the stretch from Evaline Street to Graham Street, and hopefully be ready for a spring 2022 ground-breaking.

The former Babyland store at Penn and S. Negley Avenues will soon be the site of a new KeyBank branch office. Three vacant buildings will be taken down, and an one-story building erected with a drive-through behind it. The project was snagged for several months this past spring as the city withheld its approval of a curb cut onto S. Negley Avenue. The Friendship Community Group and the BGC pushed the Mayor’s office to get involved and a compro-mise was worked out with the

developers that will enhance pedestrian safety on S. Negley Ave. while still allowing the development to move forward.

BGC staff continue to work with business owners who want to invest or to re-invest in the Penn Avenue corridor. Presently, they are assisting Mike and Jennifer Onofray in opening a brewpub at 5113 Penn next year. Their project will feature an outdoor seating area next to the pub. They have been referring prospective tenants to Josh Vender, who is renovating a building he owns at 4827 Penn, to Kulwant Pabla, who is fixing up a vacant storefront at 5222 Penn, and to John Lubarski, who is looking to lease his one-story storefront at 5152 Penn. And they have been communicating with Henry Simonds, a new investor in the corridor, as he gets ready to undertake a major project in 2020 with two buildings he owns at 5226 and 5230 Penn.

Efforts to maintain greenscape along the commercial district are on-going. The BGC worked with the city's Forestry Department to replant several landscaped beds this fall between Millvale Ave. and Evaline St. that were originally installed in 2015 when the first phase of Penn Avenue's reconstruction was done.

And the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative hosted a 23rd year of *Unblurred*, its First Friday event that opens all of the galleries, studios, and workshops on Penn to several thousand visitors, and sponsored a 6th year of the Garfield Night Market for 20 or more vendors and small organizations. A website maintained by the BGC, *pennavenue.org*, promotes these and other venues that, together, have forged a distinctive identity for the corridor.

Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center

Last year, the BGC accepted responsibility for the operations and fund-raising associated with the Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center, which has been in the Garfield community for the past 23 years. Since that transition in July of 2018, over 480 individuals have received employment readiness training and guidance in applying for jobs across the region. The end result of these efforts is the placement of 165 persons in permanent, full or part-time jobs.

Public Safety & the Environment

The BGC convened periodic meetings of its public safety task force in 2019-20 that attempt to strengthen the community's relations with the city police, city

department of permits, licenses and inspections, the county health department, juvenile and adult probation agencies, the courts, and the district attorney's office. While serious crimes in Garfield and along Penn Avenue have hit an all-time low, there are still instances of vandalism, illegal dumping, petty theft, and auto break-ins that dog the area. Garfield Jubilee Association has used the BGC's Community Activity Center to set up meet-and-greets between police officers and neighborhood youths.

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 require condemnation and eventual demolition by the city. With the URA's help, it has shepherded hundreds of tax-delinquent, vacant parcels into city ownership and hold them for future development that is consistent with the Garfield 2030 housing and land use plan.

There is fresh energy today to secure outdoor areas in Garfield for all residents to enjoy. City planning will be hiring a consultant by year's end, who will then work with neighborhood stakeholders to create a plan for enhancement and improvements to Fort Pitt Ballfield and Park. The BGC is trying to retain Healcrest Farm as a neighborhood green space while it undergoes a transfer in ownership. And Councilman Rev. Ricky Burgess has made a commitment this year to have the city purchase a vacant activities building at Broad St. and N. Atlantic Avenue from St. Maria Goretti Parish and renovate it as a city-operated rec center.

The BGC is also helping Garfield Community Farm with the acquisition of the last few parcels coming to it through the city's Vacant Property Reserve. The farm was only able to lease these lots previously from the city.

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 that they can play in making the neighborhood more safe, inclusive, and economically viable.

Support to Other Organizations & “Neighbors in Need”

The BGC lends its staff time and use of its facilities to a number of other organizations and volunteer groups, often free of charge. And it acts as a fiscal sponsor for several community agents whose missions clearly dovetail with our own, but are not able to accept funding directly.

The BGC also serves as the administrator for “Neighbors in Need”, a fund raised by East End residents to help individuals and families facing a crisis or hardship, or those need help realizing their education and employment goals. Thus far in 2019, grants have been made to 28 individuals, totaling over \$20,000.

Acknowledgement of All Who Support and Push for Positive Change

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 programming, the energy, or the technical expertise vital to sustaining our events, activities, programs and development projects, and those for whom the BGC serves as a fiscal agent.

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