

the Bulletin

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*Serving Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield,
East Liberty, and Lawrenceville since 1975*

Black farmers under- served by US policy

By Heather Hanus

Bloomfield Saturday Market

Perspective - Among the country's 3.4 million farmers, only 1.4% are Black.

This underrepresentation is apparent when visiting most farmers markets, in Pittsburgh and across the country, and it makes some shoppers wonder why farming appears so overwhelmingly white.

The answer lies in more than a century of racial discrimination against Black farmers, including exclusion from loan and relief programs, laws that exclude the economically disadvantaged, and outright violence and intimidation.

These factors have contributed to the U.S. population of Black farmers dwindling from one million strong in 1920 to less than 50,000 today.

See **Black Farmers** | page 2



ABOVE: Volunteers pause for a portrait of teamwork during the 'Garbage Olympics' competition on Sept. 17. Look to page 5 for more action from the Garfield team. Photo by Madeline Weiss.



ABOVE: Regina Brown slices through vegetables, and obstacles, with her catering company. Read about Brown's culinary journey on page 7. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.

City of Bridges Land Trust joins Module team on Rosetta St. project

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

Garfield - Module Design, LLC continues its long march towards constructing ten single-family homes in the 5100 block of Rosetta Street.

To improve its chances of making four of the homes "affordable," at the request of neighborhood representatives, Module announced at a public meeting in Garfield on Sept. 22 that City of Bridges Community Land Trust will help raise the funds needed to build them.

Ed Nusser, City of Bridges CEO, told a crowd of about 15 community members

that his agency wants to secure enough subsidy dollars so that the final sales prices for each of the four, 3-bedroom townhouses will be less than \$175,000.

Nusser acknowledged, however, that with inflation pushing up the price of construction materials, and the pronounced jump in interest rates of late, the task of "squaring the circle" on projects has become much tougher for organizations like his.

"We are thinking about using a new financing tool, the New Markets Tax Cred-

See **Rosetta St.** | page 6

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*LAWRENCEVILLE LEANS INTO
NEIGHBORHOOD METRICS*

*HOW 'SHOTSPOTTER'
SPOTS GUNFIRE IN PGH*

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Black Farmers continued from page 1

In the wake of 1933's New Deal, Black farmers trying to utilize its credit programs routinely had their loans denied by white lenders from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

This pattern repeated itself under John F. Kennedy's USDA agricultural loan program; the committee members who decided whether to approve loans were elected locally during a time when Black Americans were prohibited from voting.

Loans given to small- and medium-sized, white-owned farms were much larger than those given to similarly-sized, Black-owned farms. Black farmers who were able to obtain loans were either subjected to racist tax assessors - who set sky-high assessments, leading to unpayable tax-

es on their land - or the land was taken through legal swindles or violence. One Black farm organizer in Mississippi led a town march, and white farmers came together to kill as many as 100 Black farmers and sharecroppers.

These efforts to transfer enormous amounts of wealth from Black to white farmers were tragic yet successful; half a million Black-owned farms disappeared between 1950 and 1975, and the number of Black farmers in America decreased by 98% from 1920 to 1997.

An unchecked ability to build equity has left the current median white family 12 times wealthier than its Black counterpart. This wealth gap is larger than the wage or income gaps, with 27% of black house-

holds holding zero net worth, or less.

An effort to bend the arc of justice came in the form of the Black Farmers Act, introduced in 2020 by Cory Booker (D-NJ), and co-sponsored by Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

The bill included \$8 billion annually for new and existing Black farmers to buy land on the open market.

It also provided funding for farmer training, business assistance, and cooperative development, as well as increased support for any historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) that focus on agricultural studies.

Pushback from white farmers, lobbying groups, and big lending resulted in a re-

vision of the eligibility criteria to include any farmer who has "faced discrimination." How "discrimination" is defined, though, remains unclear, which gives the USDA broad discretion on how it distributes these funds.

By diluting the new legislation, lawmakers are essentially continuing the American legacy of racial discrimination against Black farmers.

Food systems leaders are faced with a choice: to either quietly accept the status quo of white farming, or to take a loud stand for equity and reparations in land ownership. As Malcolm X said, "Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality." ♦



The Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center is partnering with several local employers for a Fall Hiring Event with on-the-spot interviews!

Date: Wednesday, October 26, 2022

Time: 12:00pm - 4:00pm

Location: 113 N. Pacific Avenue

Feel free to join us for one of our Workshop Wednesdays in early October to help prepare for this event! Our October workshops will include resume and cover letter development and writing and interview skills.

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ABOVE: Ty McClelland, a demolition derby driver from Garfield, celebrates his success with the MWFxBOOM' Derby Car. Photo by Jason Sauer. See more on page 10.

City's Manager for Neighborhood Services visits Garfield

By Carlee Benhart Kukula Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Garfield - If the presentation by Rebekkah Ranallo at a neighborhood meeting on Sept. 6 is any indication, the Gainey Administration wants residents to hold the city accountable for the quality of services provided in their community.

Ranallo, who is the manager of a newly-created department to oversee how well services are being delivered, told an audience of thirty community members in Garfield that Mayor Gainey wants to hear from them if there is any kind of breakdown in the city's service-delivery systems.

She addressed concerns that were raised about snow-plowing neighborhood streets, cutting weed overgrowth on vacant city lots, remediating lead in water service lines, improving the process around zoning approval, and the issuance of building permits - as well as controlling the spread of raccoons, groundhogs, and other rodents in Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

Several residents were sharp in their criticisms of the city's tardiness in responding to issues and problems that they believe have a direct bearing on the quality of life on their street. Ranallo said that her department is trying to use the data it collects from public works, zoning administration, and PLI (permits, licenses, and inspections) to determine where the city's response time could be most improved.

She encouraged attendees not to give up on the 311 call-in system as the best way to report problems because, in her view, the staff handling residents' complaints are "among the most dedicated" in the city.

Hosted by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation at its Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave.), the Sept. 6 event was billed as a "State of the Neighborhood" meeting. Several door prizes, courtesy of Aldi and Commonplace Coffee, were handed out to the residents in attendance. The next "State of the Neighborhood" Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023. Local residents are welcome to attend with their questions or concerns about city services. ♦

GARFIELD TOWN HALL MEETING

- Tuesday, Nov. 1st -

Pittsburgh City Councilman Rev. Ricky Burgess will host a town hall meeting at the Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave.) in Garfield on Tuesday, Nov. 1st, at 6 p.m. Neighbors are encouraged to bring their questions & comments about: the upcoming city budget for 2023, gentrification, city services, the re-do of Fort Pitt Ballfield, funding for affordable housing, the city land bank, and other matters relevant to the future of Garfield. A light dinner will also be provided.

the Bulletin

Serving Pittsburgh's
East End neighborhoods
since 1975

with the mission of reporting on issues affecting underserved communities and facilitating local residents' exchange of ideas.

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- Deadline for the November edition is Monday, Oct. 17th -

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Board Meetings are held by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation at 6:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month, and are open to the public. For more details, email Pam@Bloomfield-Garfield.org.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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Pockmarks with potential: vacant lots of Pittsburgh

By Madeline Weiss Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

BELOW: Vacant lot at Kincaid & N. Graham Sts. in Garfield. Photo by Andrew McKeon.



Pittsburgh - Believe it or not, the city of Pittsburgh is home to over 27,000 vacant lots. There are many reasons for this, from historical population shrinkage to an aggressive program of housing demolition over a 40-year span.

But the scope of the problem today has become something that feels hard to untangle. Despite the fact that some vacant lots may pose little risk to neighboring property owners, overall they represent a serious problem for Pittsburgh communities.

Most of these lots are concentrated within low-income neighborhoods, where long-term disinvestment has further degraded the quality of the land and aging structures. These lots often become dump sites, serving as a growth source for invasive species, like knotweed, while also spreading contaminants from dilapidated buildings and lead-tainted soil.

When we think of these vacant properties, we often think of opportunities for growth. There is growth potential in these properties, but careful consideration must be given to factors such as zoning, planning, affordable housing, and land conservation.

With planning underway to create permanent green space that will not be developed at any point in the future, the Garfield GreenZone offers an example of what city neighborhoods can do with vacant lots.

Offsetting new development with undeveloped green space is important as we work to build a much better tomorrow. It also means considering different zoning possibilities to allow for more “emissions-free” solutions and neighborhood resources focused on the desires of the people who live there.

Under the City’s current state of lot acquisition, it is difficult for even the most well-intentioned community group or resident to purchase a vacant lot and transform it into an amenity their neighbors can enjoy. It can take years to purchase a City-owned lot, giving an advantage to developers [with deep pockets] and nonprofit development organizations.

By setting policies that prioritize everyday Pittsburghers, the City could transform an overwhelming problem of 27,000 vacant lots into equitable growth opportunities for its residents. ♦

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Garfield cleans up at 'Garbage Olympics'

Photos by Madeline Weiss Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

BELOW: Rick Swartz (left), Renee Robinson (center), and Gary Freshley (right) take a break before collecting more debris in Garfield.



ABOVE: Kuwame Kinsel, Manager of the Garfield Night Market, helps the neighborhood team compete in a city-wide cleanup event on Sept. 17.



ABOVE: A pile of garbage (as collected by a team of volunteers on Sept. 17) waits for pickup at N. Aiken Ave. & Hillcrest St.

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Rosetta St. *continued from page 1*

it Program, to try and close a gap that is growing wider by the month,” Nusser disclosed. The tax credits come from the federal government, and are offered through banks or government agencies to write-down the construction costs on a development project. Nusser admitted that when all of the costs of building a new, single-family, 3-bedroom home in the city are added up, the final total can easily exceed \$400,000.

City of Bridges uses a development model that retains ownership of the land in its name, and sells only the house itself to the would-be homeowner. If \$200,000 in subsidy dollars is going to be pumped into building just one house, Nusser said, City of Bridges has to find a way to control what a home can sell for when the original buyer decides to move on.

“We want the subsidy dollars to remain with the house well into the future, as much as is feasible to do,” he explained. “That way, we can see the next generation of working-class buyers benefit from what we’re investing today.” When the original buyer goes to sell the house, he or she can sell it only for a price that City of Bridges agrees is acceptable. As an example, Nusser said that over a 10-year period, this could make for a sales price that is only 15% higher than the original purchase price.

Lu Zhu, a Module representative, presented some updates on the construction project. Zhu estimated that the firm is still a year away from beginning actual construction on the three-bedroom townhomes. Module is still waiting on the purchase of nine city-owned lots from the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Those lots will then be subdivided into 10 distinct parcels; five sets of semi-detached houses will be built on these parcels.

The six market-rate homes will be mixed together with the four affordable units so

that one house will be indistinguishable from the other, Zhu said, and it is too soon to tell what the sales prices would be on the non-subsidized units. He said Module would be looking to a local bank, and possibly a second lender like Bridgeway Capital, for the construction financing on the development.

In an effort to improve the marketability of the homes, according to Zhu, Module is giving serious consideration to using the front yard of six of the homes as parking spaces for cars. The other four homes are projected to have integral garages. Zhu said that Module’s geotechnical investigations have indicated that soil at the site cannot support the weight of garages built underneath all ten homes. The notion of incorporating front-yard parking into the site plan drew a response from Rick Swartz, executive director of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), who told Zhu that the BGC has a history of opposing applications for front-yard parking in both the Garfield and Friendship neighborhoods. Swartz said he could not predict what type of response the BGC’s board of directors will have to this change in the project’s design.

Plans for the creation of a landscaped buffer between the development and the rest of the block west of N. Evaline Street are still in a state of flux. There is a vacant lot being targeted on the north side of Rosetta, close to where city steps come up to Rosetta from Kincaid Street. Zhu said Module has been contributing some ideas to what the buffer could look like, but maintained that this project is not one that Module can pay for, especially since the lot in question is in the city’s possession. Madeline Weiss, the GreenZone coordinator for the BGC, said the funding for the buffer would most likely need to come from the city. A Garfield resident in attendance, Peggy Wilson, suggested they look at the notion of creating a “tot lot” for children.

Zhu said the next step in the pre-development process will be to “bring the project before the Zoning Board of Adjustment, hopefully before the year has ended”. Several variances will be needed, as the zoning for the street does not normally allow for semi-detached housing units.

Module will also need some relief from having to meet the setback requirements for front yards and sideyards. Zhu reiterated Module’s plans to have the structural elements of the homes built at a modular factory outside of Allegheny County, and then transported in box-like form to the site on Rosetta. ♦



ABOVE: Ose Akinlotan (center), a City of Pittsburgh Planner, introduces Lu Zhu of Module Design at a Sept. 21 meeting in Garfield. Attendees discussed Module’s plans for a new housing development on Rosetta Street. Photo by Madeline Weiss.

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Regina Brown elevates catering business with Catapult Culinary

By Elizabeth Sensky *East Liberty Development, Inc.*

Insight/East End - Regina Brown was always whipping up meals for friends and family when they would stop by her place in Garfield. But when Brown's family and friends started offering to pay her to make dishes for them, she realized that her passion for food could turn into something more.

"That's when I started thinking this could be a nice side hustle," she said. Brown eventually began promoting her catering services - and named her side hustle "The Fine Feather," an old term for good health and wealth. "That is the vibe I bring whenever I'm cooking and catering," Brown explained. "Homestyle food that fulfills the soul while also being refined."

Brown does not use salt in her dishes, instead incorporating herbs for more flavor, and said she made the switch after witnessing loved ones suffer from high blood pressure. "I want to provide meals that are still flavorful, but low in salt intake," she said "I love using natural herbs and learning about the benefits they offer."

Born and raised in Garfield, Brown worked in administration for Family Resources and UPMC until she resigned in 2020 to pursue catering full-time. She is one of the new graduates of Catapult Greater Pittsburgh's culinary program, Catapult Culinary, a 12-month business incubation program for minority, food-based entrepreneurs. The program provides technical training, networking opportunities, access to commercial kitchen space, and other supports.

Catapult helped Brown overcome the challenges she faced when getting The Fine Feather off the ground, from learning how to work without the 9-to-5 structure to finding resources that could aid her small business. Through the program, she connected with Roxanne Easley (of Roxanne's Catering, a well-established, Pittsburgh-based company), who is now her mentor.

"My goal is to expand, get a great team together, and to provide the best service," Brown explained. "I want to get people to see that upscale or fine dining doesn't have to be a French bistro. It can be the food they grew up eating, just with a little more detail and love in it."

At ELDI's (East Liberty Development, Inc.) July mixer, which was catered by The Fine Feather, Brown prepared a diverse spread - including a fruit and dessert display, pasta served in martini glasses, salmon sliders, savory meatballs, creamy mac & cheese, and shrimp cocktail shooters, among other delights.

As Brown continues to grow her business, Catapult has widened her perspective, getting her to think beyond just catering events. With connections to some big players in the local food scene, like Giant Eagle, Catapult Culinary is helping businesses get their food on grocery store shelves.

"[The program] helped me recognize that, somewhere along this life journey, I stopped being ambitious," Brown said. "And it taught me to start dreaming big again." ♦



ABOVE: Regina Brown's catering spread turns heads at ELDI's July Mixer. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.

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Neighborhood FOCUS

Lawrenceville metrics: reflecting on data, forging new path

By Emily Persico *Lawrenceville Corporation*

Perspective/Lawrenceville - When speaking to people across the city, there is a sentiment that Lawrenceville is not gentrifying, but “fully gentrified” - as if the neighborhood has come to some final resting point, often referred to as “market maturity.”

It is true that community groups like Lawrenceville Corporation (LC), which once worked to create a market in the neighborhood are now doing everything they can to balance powerful market demands with community needs and priorities. Despite these dramatic changes, terms like “gentrified” (past tense) and “market

maturity” underestimate the significant change that is still underway in the neighborhood, or the substantial and persistent needs of the community’s most marginalized residents.

According to recent estimates, more than 600 residential units are expected to be built over the next few years in Lawrenceville. Doughboy Square Apartments, one of the area’s early large-scale developments, recently sold to a new owner for \$7.2 million, a sale that was far from the largest transaction to rock the neighborhood this year.

In a recent *Pittsburgh Business Times* article, the new owner remarked, “Lawrenceville and the Strip District is one of the best submarkets in any major city located along the East Coast.”

Butler Street and its 300 small businesses represent one of the city’s longest, continuous retail districts. Over the past decade, return on investment for the typical buyer in Lawrenceville was over 2,000% higher than in almost any other market in the country. Development shows no signs of slowing down and, with an explosion of commercial and residential construction on the way, it might even be accelerating.

This economic investment has brought with it improved safety, schools, employ-

- continued on next page -



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BELOW: Lawrenceville Corporation launches its neighborhood report on Oct. 27. Graphic courtesy of Emily Persico.



- continued from previous page -

ment opportunities, and business district vitality. There is now more opportunity to thrive and more places to live in Lawrenceville than there were 20 years ago, and it is our job to make sure that opportunity extends to everyone.

The past ten years has seen a decrease in affordability - pricing out some of the small, locally-owned businesses and causing significant displacement of Black residents, children, and senior citizens.

Inclusionary Zoning, affordable retail space, community planning, and participation in the development process can help ensure that future development brings with it increased opportunity and access.

We need to create a common baseline of understanding to ensure that relationships across identity are intentionally forged, that community plans are followed, and that local residents and stakeholders have self-determination over the future of their neighborhood.

To this end, LC is proud to announce the release of *Lawrenceville Neighborhood*

'There is now more opportunity to thrive and more places to live in Lawrenceville than there were 20 years ago, and it is our job to make sure that opportunity extends to everyone.'

Metrics, a comprehensive report on the neighborhood that focuses on everything from demographics, housing, and real estate development to business district vitality, mobility, and environmental issues.

LC will leverage the data from this report in tandem with our neighborhood partners, plans, and ongoing community input to advocate for much-needed infrastructure investments and move us closer to residents' collective vision of Lawrenceville.

Learn more about the metrics report at lvpg.com/neighborhood-metrics. Join us on Oct. 27, from 5-7 p.m. at the Ice House Studios (100 43rd St.), to celebrate our launch of the report. RSVP for the event at bit.ly/LVFallOpenHouse. ♦

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ABOVE: Ty McClelland, a Garfield driver who won second place at the the Iron City Nationals on Sept. 10, enjoys his new hardware. Challenging all front-runners in the Most Wanted Fine Art (MWFA) Stockcar Challenge heat, McClelland helped drive change with BOOM Concepts and MWFA. Photo by Jason Sauer.

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A collage of four photographs showing students. One student is holding a certificate, another is holding a trophy, and two others are posing with balloons that say "2022".

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Pittsburgh's gunfire detection technology garners praise, concern

By Charlie Wolfson, Amelia Winger & Rich Lord *PublicSource*

Pittsburgh - Finding the location of gunplay used to be a guessing game.

"If shots ring out in the middle of the night, you wake up, you think you hear gunshots," Thomas Stangrecki, acting chief of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, told PublicSource in an August interview. In a call to 911, you might guess where the sound came from, he continued. Police would then arrive, "listen for gunshots, look for evidence ... casings or whatever."

Increasingly, though, Pittsburgh police pinpoint the locations of shots with the help of acoustic sensors provided by the California company ShotSpotter under a \$1.2-million-a-year contract. In 2021, the bureau received data on 2,874 incidents in which one or more bullets were fired, according to the ShotSpotter sensor system now arrayed across one-third of the city.

"ShotSpotter is really the best means of getting any kind of gauge of what actual gun violence looks like in the city in terms of shots fired," said Heath Johnson, a bureau crime analyst.

The use of ShotSpotter's sensors, algorithms and human reviewers to "save lives, solve cases and deter crime" — as its website claims, and as some city leaders echo — has raised questions, locally and nationally, about the fairness of computer-driven justice. Civil libertarians contend that arrests and convictions based on technology that is likely opaque to juries could tilt the scales against defendants who are, constitutionally, presumed innocent.

Those concerns have become part of a case now before the state Supreme Court in which a lawyer for an incarcerated Pittsburgh man argues that ShotSpotter data was inappropriately allowed as evidence in his trial. The Innocence Project and the American Civil Liberties Union have filed briefs in the case, arguing in their filings that ShotSpotter is part of "a larger pattern of flawed science polluting our criminal legal system."

"You're seeing GPS, you're seeing facial recognition, you're seeing cell phone location, in addition to ShotSpotter," said Justin Romano, a Downtown-based lawyer who is challenging Angelo Weeden's conviction for aggravated assault, following a trial that included ShotSpotter-generated evidence. "The defense is fighting a battle with at least one hand tied behind its back if it's facing this evidence with no means of questioning it."

ShotSpotter has countered such critiques by calling its technology "simple and transparent."

The company's Vice President for Analytics and Forensic Services Tom Chittum, a veteran of federal law enforcement, said there was once skepticism about the evidentiary value of digital photography.

"In time," he told PublicSource, "these things become accepted."

'The way of policing in the future'

Pittsburgh began using ShotSpotter in early 2015 over a 3-square-mile area in the northeast of the city. Ricky Burgess, the city councilman for that area, pitched it as a crime deterrent, a tool for prosecutors and a boost to police officer safety. It was also billed as a sort of automatic 911 system, summoning police and medical assistance to gunshot victims even when nobody picks up the phone.

Public safety officials went to council in 2016 to recommend expansion of the system, saying it was successful in identifying shots that were not reported in 911 calls. A Bureau of Police analyst told council that the bureau used ShotSpotter data to "strategically deploy officers to areas with high gun violence."

"This is the way of policing in the future," Burgess said at that meeting. "Cameras and ShotSpotter and using technology for greater accuracy."

ShotSpotter installs acoustic sensors in locations like the tops of buildings, streetlight poles and cellphone towers. The sensors listen for "loud, impulsive sounds," which can

include everything from gunfire to fireworks, car engines and jackhammers.

When at least three sensors detect a sound, ShotSpotter pinpoints an 82-foot radius from which the noise originated using a multilateration algorithm — a method, similar to triangulation, that determines a sound's location using the times it was picked up by the sensors. The algorithm also filters sounds unlikely to be gunfire.

After the algorithms run, ShotSpotter's sensors send a recording of the sound to one of the company's Incident Review Centers, where human reviewers listen to the audio and confirm whether it was likely gunfire. Reviewers make judgment calls based on factors like if there appeared to be multiple rounds of gunshots, multiple shooters or moving shooters.

Once a human reviewer determines the sensors have likely detected gunfire, they send the location of the gunshots to the bureau. The entire process takes roughly one minute. The bureau then sends the information to the county's 911 dispatching center.

By the start of 2018, city council, then-Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich and then-Mayor Bill Peduto were sufficiently impressed to invest in expanding the system to 18 out of the city's total 55.4 square miles. The contract runs through 2025. The annual \$1.2 million cost accounts for roughly 1% of the city's 2022 police budget.

The ShotSpotter expansion reached into each region, with much of the North Side, Hazelwood, West End, Hill District and Homewood covered. Johnson said it might make sense to increase ShotSpotter's footprint in the city's South Hills.

The system has become ingrained in the police bureau's everyday operations. Officers respond to more gunshot alerts from the California-based analysis center than gunshots reported in 911 calls.

With five years' worth of hindsight, Burgess is still a strong proponent of the system. "It has been very effective and efficient," the councilman said recently. "It has been an excellent tool."

- continued on next page -

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ShotSpotter

continued from page 11

But when is ShotSpotter evidence?

The power — and perhaps the peril — of ShotSpotter are at the center of Romano’s case. Weeden, now 71, of the North Side, was accused of cutting off a former romantic partner’s vehicle with his own, trying to force open her doors and then firing a gun as she pulled away.

In an interview, Romano called it “a circumstantial case. No one ever saw Angelo Weeden with a weapon, discharging a weapon.” The prosecution wrote in its briefs that a 7-year-old daughter of Weeden’s ex saw a gun.

The trial included testimony from the ex, another passenger and from Weeden’s alibi witnesses, but no ballistics evidence. “And then there’s the ShotSpotter,” Romano said.

A report called an Investigative Lead Summary, generated by ShotSpotter, indicated that two rounds were fired near where Harbison Avenue meets Shadeland Avenue in Brighton Heights at 7:43 p.m. Dec. 15, 2018. That roughly matched the ex’s account.

Over Romano’s objections, Judge Jill Rangos of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas allowed the report to be put into evidence. She permitted testimony explaining it by a city detective, without requiring that a ShotSpotter expert detail the technology.

A jury found Weeden guilty of aggravated assault and related charges, and Rangos sentenced him to 10 to 20 years in prison. Romano has appealed the conviction to the state Supreme Court. He has argued in his briefs that ShotSpotter has “inherent unreliability,” but that Weeden was not able to “confront this evidence in any meaningful way,” which violated his constitutional rights.

The ACLU of Pennsylvania and The Innocence Project, in a jointly filed friend-of-the-court brief, argued that ShotSpotter “relies on an unvetted computer algorithm and the subjective impressions of human reviewers to characterize the audio snippets.”

The Allegheny County District Attorney’s office has responded in filings defending the prosecution that the ShotSpotter evidence didn’t matter much. The jury apparently believed the ex, and not the alibi witness, rendering the report “superfluous.”

Romano, though, said in an interview that ShotSpotter’s report was viewed as corroborating the ex’s account. “I think it’s fair to say that was a key piece of evidence.”

He’s seeking a new trial.

Supreme Court decisions often set precedents, so a ruling on the admissibility of ShotSpotter evidence could affect the way such technology is used in future trials.

Chittum declined to comment on the case, but said he did not see cause for concern. ShotSpotter can send experts to explain the system at trials, he said. While the government would have to cover costs, he said, “It’s not expensive.”

Romano, though, hopes the case will spur the court to set much-needed standards for the admissibility of high-tech evidence. “A thoughtful decision on this case could have broader implications in the testimonial evidence and the forensic evidence world.”

Rising arrests, more victims found

Pittsburgh police use ShotSpotter for more than just the occasional trial. The bureau claims that the system:

- Alerts the bureau and dispatchers to gunfire faster and more reliably than 911 calls
- Allows officers to safely and strategically deploy
- Helps to locate victims — including 13 over a two-year period — that might otherwise have been discovered too late
- Points officers to evidence that might otherwise have been lost.

A summary provided by the bureau suggests that ShotSpotter is becoming more and more important, as reports, arrests and firearm confiscations attributable to the sensor system in the first six months of this year outpaced 2021. The bureau also uses ShotSpotter data to produce daily maps of shots fired.

“It may drive some proactive patrols” and investigatory attention, said Stangrecki, adding that manpower deployment hasn’t really changed much since ShotSpotter was deployed.


‘Too many mixed results’

The inspector general of Chicago, a city that uses ShotSpotter over 100 square miles, suggested that the system gives officers “generalized perceptions” of certain areas and “may be substantively changing policing behavior.” The inspector’s August 2021 report warned that ShotSpotter may cause officers to respond to incidents “with little contextual information about what they will find there — raising the specter of poorly informed decision-making by responding members.”

The inspector general’s review of Chicago’s ShotSpotter usage found that during a 17-month period, 9% of ShotSpotter alerts resulted in evidence of a gun-related crime and 2% resulted in an investigatory stop. ShotSpotter responded that gun recoveries driven by its alerts skewed much higher in some parts of Chicago than others, “indicating that how ShotSpotter is used and hyper-local factors can impact its effectiveness.”

In Pittsburgh, according to data provided by the police bureau, 20% of ShotSpotter alerts in 2021 resulted in any type of evidence collection, 3% resulted in an arrest and 4% led police to a victim in need of assistance. Even though the vast majority of alerts don’t result in arrests, they may result in the discovery of a shell casing or other piece of ballistics evidence that may tie into another case, Stangrecki said.

- continued on page 15 -



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LOCAL REAL ESTATE BLOTTER

- Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield, East Liberty, Lawrenceville, & Stanton Heights -

Real Estate Sales for the month of July 2022

Compiled by Lillian Denhardt, Residential Realtor

Bloomfield

Matthew J Hogle to Rhiannon L Weaver at 419 Taylor St. for \$365,000.

Estate of Angela DiMatteo to Jason Glenn O'Toole at 412 Pearl St. for \$255,000.

Raymond & Marjorie Webber to Marina Mangubi at 352 Garnet Way for \$120,000.

Matt A Guidish to Blue Chip Enterprises, LLC at 423 Fisk St. for \$360,000.

Gregory J Logan to Simon David Knapp at 4068 Howley St. for \$368,000.

Willow R Moskyok to Colter C & Nicola J Ritsch at 222 S. Millvale Ave. for \$408,000.

Jesse Rothschild to Dilla R Mastrangelo at 204 S. Atlantic Ave. for \$487,938.

James F & Linda Fine Petraglia to Burgh Brothers, LLC at 4738 Liberty Ave. for \$250,000.

Anthony Ficorilli to Xiangwei & Xiao at 4918 Liberty Ave. for \$447,000.

Friendship

David Adamson to Hazel Virdo at 207 S. Aiken Ave. for \$587,000.

Charles J Gianakas to Daniel Matthew John Hodgman at 367 S. Graham St. for \$640,000.

Erick W Fuentes to Summerlea Properties, LLC at 5535 Centre Ave. for \$260,000.

Garfield

5211 Penn Ave., LLC to Real Deals, LLC at 5211 Penn Ave. for \$231,000.

Mixtape, LLC to Fuller Family Services, LLC at 4907 Penn Ave. for \$338,000.

Jbreziel, LLC to Evolve Coaching, Inc. at 5025 Penn Ave. for \$570,000.

Charles H McCurdy to Olivetta Uradu at 114 N. Evaline St. for \$110,000.

Charles Durham to A&S Home Ventura, LLC at 4819 Kincaid St. for \$175,000.

East Liberty

ZYT Management to Neills Investments, LLC at 615 N. Beatty St. for \$220,000.

Liberty Lutheran Church East to Shady Centre, LLC at 5707 Penn Ave. for \$2,100,000.

Covenant Church Everlasting to East Liberty Development, Inc. at 130 Larimer Ave. for \$0.

Larry V Manno to Maggie Lin at 5650 Rural St. for \$175,000.

Larry V Manno to Maggie Lin at 0 Rural St. for \$175,000.

Richard J Engel to Paul A Kropfl at 725 N. Saint Clair St. for \$485,000.

Adriana Vega to Mia P Sorada at 537 Mellon St. for \$290,000.

Brittney Colninger to Del Cjr Markward at 617 N. Saint Clair St. for \$665,000.

Jeffrey P & Kelli D Slevin to Gloria Minella at 5814 Hays St. for \$754,000.

Christopher Skelly to Elizabeth S Reich at 700 Collins Ave. for \$380,000.

Dora M Pluefer to Vlad Kaplun at 546 -548

N. Sheridan Ave. for \$430,000.

Bin & Chao Shi Guo to Tumbo, LLC Yu at 525 Collins Ave. for \$200,000.

Lawrenceville

US Bank National Association to Oxbridge Development Corp. at 701 Kendall St. for \$101,000.

VP Management, LLC to Lorraine Lawrence, LLC at 242 46th St. for \$305,000.

Lakewood Management Group, LLC to Life of Reilly Properties, LLC at 4045 Geneva St. for \$271,000.

Dorothy Ujcic to 180 Degrees Property Investment, LLC at 5410 Carnegie St. for \$205,500.

SWZ Properties, LLC to Elaine Eason at 3512 Leech St. for \$320,000.

Kirberg Construction, LLC to Alison Rose Karsh at 1001 Premier St. for \$240,000.

Wallrock, LLC to Aux Funding, LLC at 211 57th St. for \$1,506,685.

Alexander C Laskin to Rainy Sinclair at 3612 Mintwood St. for \$450,000.

Shirley M Kempf to Duke & Duke Estates, LLC at 3626 Liberty Ave. for \$86,000.

Victor L Hildebrand to Joule Design, LLC at

169 41st St. for \$545,000.

Jennifer E Lake to Michael Patrick Jr & Lauren Elizabeth O'Malley at 121 41st St. for \$437,650.

Lisa A Wallace to Nicholas Pearson Case at 270 46th St. for \$313,000.

Chester Plonski to Katrina & John McClelland at 322 42nd St. for \$351,000.

VP Management, LLC to Daniel J Bernstein at 4231 Dunkeld Way for \$179,000.

Patricia J McLendon to David M Spinder at 438 44th St. for \$265,000.

James M & Janet M Michulka to McChow Holdings, LLC at 4418 Sherrod St. for \$130,000.

Dale M Kobrin to Robert & Laurie Cassidy at 338 45th St. for \$570,000.

Lawrenceville Lofts, LLC to Stephanie M Lee at 3725 Butler St. Unit 302 for \$689,000.

Lawrenceville Lofts, LLC to Zachary Wein at 3725 Butler St. Unit 407 for \$549,000.

Sylvia Rhett to CJ Real Estate Management at 3502 Penn Ave. for \$80,000.

MRA Global Solutions, LLC to Richard Perez at 4839 Butler St. for \$590,000.

BFB Enterprises, Inc. to Silver Blue Sea Enterprises, LLC at 5128 Butler St. for

\$538,000.

Neil Kiran Kulkarni to Anthony & Erica Marie Cebzanov at 5111 Keystone St. for \$460,000.

Joseph T Kotila to Raj Ramanan at 5112 -5114 Stanton Ave. for \$730,000.

Wallrock, LLC to Aux Funding, LLC at 804 McCandless Ave. for \$1,506,685.

Gregory J & Christy Lynn Cox Galvez to Vidcomm Fund1, LLC at 714 Leydon St. for \$193,000.

Samuel B & Sara Ann O'Toole Loevner to Scott A Pipitone at 805 54th St. for \$850,000.

Thomas P Goter to Melissa E Anderson at 38 48th St. for \$525,000.

Stanton Heights

Cory R Gwin to Noah E & Amanda R Hodge at 4336 Stanton Ave. for \$385,000.

Janice M Walker to Fifth Avenue Property Group, LLC at 4728 Stanton Ave. for \$125,000.

Huy K Hoang to Ross James Lantz at 4267 Stanton Ave. for \$185,400.

Marlene Ann Jadowiec to Junoon Realty, LLC at 943 Woodbine St. for \$95,000.

Rozalia Jordan to Elaina Brown at 216 Schenley Manor Dr. for \$155,000.

Paula June Kearney to Koby Jordan Kearney at 830 Oranmore St. for \$55,000.

This column, which uses data from Allegheny County's online portal, contains occasional errors. If something looks off, let us know.

Feel free to call with questions, or just to chat about real estate in your neighborhood. Contact Lillian at lillian@agent-lillian.com or 412-335-6068. ♦



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LHS presents 'Fish Stories with Jim Nied'

By James Wudarczyk *Lawrenceville Historical Society*

Lawrenceville - For 78 years, Jim Nied and his family hosted diners, music lovers, and renters at Nied's Hotel (5438 Butler St.).

Home of "Nied's Famous Fish Sandwich," the establishment was forced to close in January 2019. Over the years, the Nied family has collected a lot of stories - so many that the Lawrenceville Historical Society is now providing a platform for Jim to talk about his experiences serving the local community.

Jim's favorite renter, Slim Forsythe, a country/folk performer who is well-known in these parts, will also be along for the ride on Wednesday, Oct. 19, in the basement lecture hall of Lawrenceville's Carnegie Library (279 Fisk St.). The event will begin at 5:30 p.m.; parking is available on the street, or in the adjacent parking lot at the Stephen Foster Community Center. ♦



ABOVE: If the walls could talk at Nied's Hotel, Pittsburghers would learn way too much about the history of their city. Photo courtesy of James Wudarczyk.



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ShotSpotter *continued from page 12*

The bureau is now “accustomed to ShotSpotter and the accuracy with which it locates where the shooting occurred and the speed with which officers are dispatched,” and losing that tool would reduce efficiency, the acting chief added.

City Controller Michael Lamb told PublicSource he needs to see more data to be convinced of ShotSpotter’s worth.

“To me, I don’t know that we’ve got viable proof that it has really assisted public safety,” Lamb said. “My feeling is that sometime between now and the next time we renew the contract we need to take a deeper dive. ... Right now, there are too many mixed results that we’re seeing.”

In their friend-of-the-court brief, the ACLU and the Innocence Project cast doubt on one of ShotSpotter’s core advertised claims: that it advances prosecution of gun-related crimes. “Even the most cursory glance under the hood reveals a fundamentally subjective, untested system that is dependent on human intervention at every step of its operation,” the brief states.

PublicSource asked both the Bureau of Police and the DA’s office if they knew how many prosecutions were informed by ShotSpotter evidence. Neither had a definitive tally.

Mike Manko, spokesperson for the district attorney, called ShotSpotter “useful to law enforcement to the extent that it acts as an audial 911 system to help locate potential crimes” but “not critical information for the prosecution of those crimes and suspects.” Stangrecki agreed that even if ShotSpotter evidence was not admissible in court, the evidence the bureau assembles as a result of the system’s alerts would help. “Hopefully,” he said, “everything together is impacting crime.”

Fooled by fireworks?

The ShotSpotter system isn’t perfect.

Pittsburgh police received 36 ShotSpotter alerts on July 4, 2021, about four times more than the daily average. More than half of the alerts came at night as fireworks boomed across the city. Police only generated seven reports of gunshot-related crimes.

Officers are encouraged to respond to every ShotSpotter alert as soon as possible. On high-volume days like July 4, officers use a triage strategy — they prioritize responding to ShotSpotter alerts that correspond with 911 calls and typically investigate the remaining alerts at some point before the end of their shift, whether that’s minutes or hours after the alert was issued, according to Johnson. This policy means that on days like Jan. 1 — when officers received 185 alerts, nearly three-quarters of which coincided with New Year’s fireworks — police could be investigating dozens and dozens of false alarms. On Jan. 1, police only reported eight gunshot-related crimes.

Officers are instructed to write an investigative report about ShotSpotter alerts only when they recover evidence, identify a victim, find damage to city-owned property, discover another officer is involved or are instructed to by their supervisor. In 2021, 21% of ShotSpotter alerts resulted in police penning a report. Johnson said that prior to the city installing ShotSpotter, report and arrest rates for gunfire-related crimes were far lower,

though he did not have specifics. “I can assure you that your average 911 caller is far less accurate in terms of identifying whether or not it was truly gunfire,” Johnson said.

ShotSpotter itself also takes measures to improve its accuracy during time periods when it anticipates an influx of explosive noises that could be wrongly categorized as gunfire. Email exchanges between ShotSpotter and the bureau show that the company updated its detection algorithms before the Fourth of July to better parse out fireworks. Stangrecki said gunfire may have occurred at the scene of ShotSpotter alerts, regardless of whether officers deemed the scene notable enough to write a report.

“If they don’t locate any evidence, it doesn’t mean it didn’t occur — it’s just that they didn’t find any evidence,” he said. “Could be late at night, maybe there’s one shot and it’s in a wooded area.”

In 2021, about 20% of ShotSpotter alerts resulted in police collecting evidence, typically ballistic remnants like shell casings. Johnson said that although finding evidence may not yield immediate benefits, it can pay off over time.

“If we can find that the same firearm has been at these different instances, it helps our detectives build investigative leads, put together cases in important ways,” Johnson said.

Placing sensors, mapping shots

Pittsburgh police determined where to station ShotSpotter sensors based on concentrations of 911 calls for gunshots, non-fatal shootings and homicides. In the past year, the sensors have continued to identify neighborhoods like Homewood, Hazelwood and Arlington as hotspots for gunfire.

Johnson said that ShotSpotter’s precision in pinpointing where gunfire occurs helps with efficiently deploying officers to investigate scenes, especially as police manpower shrinks.

“If you just have a lot more officers aimlessly driving around trying to find where a potential site where a scene might have occurred, it’s just more opportunities for confusion, mistrust, perhaps, stops that generally would have been avoided,” Johnson said.

Even with two-thirds of the city outside of ShotSpotter’s range, Stangrecki doesn’t feel that officers are missing many reports of gunfire in the out-of-range zones.

“In a perfect world, if we had a lot of money, we probably could cover the whole entire city,” Stangrecki said. “I don’t think it makes sense at this point to try to cover the entire city if some areas are not seeing any or a large amount of shots fired.”

Johnson, the bureau’s crime analyst, called any claim that ShotSpotter prevents gun violence “tenuous.” But if it even gets one shooter off the streets, he added, “hopefully there’ll be fewer instances of gun violence perpetrated by that individual.”

Those concerned about the development of “a surveillance state,” he added, should probably focus elsewhere. “The one thing I would want to be surveilled is gun violence. And it does do that.”

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Lawrenceville Farmers Market moves from Arsenal Park to Bay 41

A Message from the Lawrenceville Farmers Market

Lawrenceville – Now that fall has arrived, the Lawrenceville Farmers Market (LFM) is ready to supply local households with all the autumnal produce they need this season.

Stop by the market on Tuesdays (from 3-7 p.m., through Nov. 22) to pick up squash for a nice pan-roast, apples and pears to make crisps & crumbles, and a variety of vegetables fit for soups and stews.

Due to the impending construction at Arsenal Park, LFM operations have moved to Bay 41 (115 41st St.) for the 2022 season. Every Tuesday afternoon, rain or shine, the space [adjacent to Willow St.] is filled with vendors selling produce, meat, cheese, baked goods, prepared foods, and home & body products. For those who prefer shopping in a masked retail environment, we hold the “masked shopping hour” every week from 3-4 p.m.

Since the majority of our vendors sell food items for the household, customers are welcome to use SNAP benefits at the market. For every \$5 spent with your EBT or P-EBT card at the info booth, you will receive a \$2 Food Bucks voucher to spend on fresh fruit and vegetables. If you received Food Bucks RX from a doctor’s office or local organization, you can spend them on LFM produce.

In addition to the vendors, we are joined by staff from State Rep. Sara Innamorato’s office and various community partners, based on the theme of the week: Seniors, Kids & Families, and Mutual Aid & Community Health.

This season, we have welcomed representatives from POGO, Tree PGH, and the county health department’s Overdose Prevention & STD/HIV Program, to name a few. A new element at the market, the LFM Kids Table, hosts “craft-of-the-week” activities along with a children’s scavenger hunt.

Thank you to the LFM sponsors - UPMC, Dollar Bank, and New Alliance Federal Credit Union - who have supported our success in 2022. The farmers market is a program of Lawrenceville United (LU), a resident-driven, neighborhood nonprofit. To learn more, please contact LU at 412-802-7220 or info@LUnited.org. ♦



ABOVE: The Lawrenceville Farmers Market, as framed by beautiful skies at Bay 41. Photo courtesy of Bryanna Johnson.



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