



Housing Advocates Aim to Maintain Affordability

by Alexis Miller

The PHCA Housing Committee meets a few times a year to discuss growing development interest in the neighborhood and how to best support both new and long-term residents, and promote a vibrant neighborhood with a diversity of homes and businesses. As many have noticed, there have been some significant projects in Polish Hill that brought vacant, blighted houses from the brink of demolition to modern, bright and updated homes.

As high sales prices from Lawrenceville spill over into Polish Hill the average home price over the last two years has increased dramatically. However, there are still just around 12 properties sold per year and vacant and rundown buildings remain. As more investors are interested in making money in the neighborhood, the PHCA continues to advocate for diversity and mixed income in the neighborhood, which includes promoting affordable housing.

One of the strategies that the PHCA first initiated about three years ago is acquiring vacant, tax-delinquent properties through a special part of the treasurer's sale that gives non-profit community organizations the opportunity to purchase properties that do not sell at treasurer's sale. In this process, the City of Pittsburgh sells these properties to non-profit community organizations for a very low price and clears all the back taxes and liens. There are many steps to this Property Reserve process and reasons why the property may not be eligible or why someone else may win



Construction on Dobson St.

the property, so it can take several years before the non-profit owns the property. It continues to be an important tool for many communities in Pittsburgh to fight blight and have influence over development projects.

The PHCA's goal of acquiring these properties is to sell them to owner-occupants and low to moderate income families or individuals, as well as to have influence over future development projects. The PHCA has also been in talks with other neighborhood groups and community partners on creating long-term affordability through a model called a community land trust.

Fire Site Update

By and large, renovating existing houses is not cheap, but it costs less money than building new construction. With less and less government funds available to subsidize new construction, the PHCA has been working hard over the past three years at applying for grants and

meeting with the City and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to find ways to finance new construction at the Fire Site that will have some kind of affordable or sub-market rate rents or sales prices. That project is not dead, but continues to move slowly as we explore different funding sources and may work with the URA to look for different developers that can offer different financing options and design solutions.

Groups Study Busway Development

Lastly, a larger planning project focused on the Herron Avenue stop on the East Busway started in February. The Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group (PCRG), Port Authority and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) sponsored a study that was funded through the Urban Land Institute Pittsburgh by a grant from the Urban Land Institute. The study was about land use around the Herron Avenue stop in Polish Hill, Lawrenceville, and the Strip District. The focus of the study is to find better ways to use the land around that stop to make it into a more thriving and connected transit-oriented development (TOD).

The PHCA was briefly interviewed as part of the ULI's study, along with other stakeholders. The final report is still being drafted. This study will likely just be the beginning of work to plan for development in this area, especially as Donnie's Place property, the Iron City Brewery, and other lots and warehouses surrounding the Herron Avenue bus stop are for sale. The PHCA will post the final report from the ULI as soon as it is ready.

Letter from the President: A Call for Unity via Service

As summer begins the country finds itself grappling with a particularly divisive political landscape; however, I find myself with an optimistic perspective.

Training for work has taken me away from Polish Hill until just recently. However, wherever I find myself, and whomever I meet one thought comes to mind: much more unites Americans than divides us. Back home in Polish Hill, we are united in our shared interests that transcend politics. We share the same streets and we want them to be safe, our children attend the same schools, and we all cherish our hometown values; some of us even share walls!

Now more than ever Americans, Pittsburghers, and Polish Hill'ers alike can show their unity by coming together and volunteering for service in our local communities. Volunteering just one hour per month can have a huge impact in our community. It's the difference between driving by a vacant lot overgrown with weeds or one covered with a garden of sunflowers. The difference between City Steps covered in graffiti tags or beautiful murals.

I encourage everyone to make time for volunteerism, both here in Polish Hill -- and with our affiliated community organizations doing great work in the area.

"Be the change that you want to see in the world" -- M. Gandhi

For a list of opportunities and affiliate organizations, as well as events, please follow us on Facebook, Blogski, and NextDoor. We look forward to hearing your feedback and sharing stories about how our neighbors are having a positive impact on the community.

Brian A. Seklecki
President - Polish Hill Civic Association

About Brian: Brian has lived in Polish Hill since 2008. He's a civic-oriented I.T. guy who started volunteering to help the PHCA with tech problems in the office, but quickly became involved in the Gardens & Green Spaces initiatives and the Harmar St. Community Garden. His passions are cycling and sustainability and renewable energy, and he just trained to become a Wind Turbine Technician.

PHCA Community Meetings

We're on summer vacation! There are no meetings in July & Aug.
Monthly meetings will resume
September 5th at 6:30pm in the West Penn Rec Center

Try Heritage Seeds for Better Production

by Terry Doloughty, Green Team

With the warm days finally here it's not too late to think about planning our gardens to get the most out of our spaces.

Take a moment to consider the sources we use to get our seeds. Do you just grab a pack of seeds because you see them on display? Do you pour through catalogs to find unique varieties?

We can stretch that planning out one more year to get your garden plants to the next level of quality and possibly higher production.

Consider incorporating heritage seeds and heirloom varieties into your gardening adventure. We can all benefit by having these hardy survivors growing in our gardens. Along with history, family stories and amazing flavors heritage seeds can be saved, traded, and handed down to new gardeners over time. Many of our modern hybrid crops do not produce viable seeds. It can be good for the seed catalogs, guaranteeing repeat customers.

We have other options and should consider all the ways we can expand our options for best results. Grow Pittsburgh has hosted seed exchanges, some of your neighbors may have seeds to share. Seed and plant exchange is a great way to know your fellow gardeners and neighbors. Phipps Conservancy offers good tips for seed seeking gardeners.

You can find more information from Phipps at:
<https://hipps.conservatory.org/green-innovation/at-home/greener-gardening-tips/tips-for-smart-seed-shopping>

Looking forward to seeing you all around the neighborhood getting dirty, having fun, and sharing!

Father Mark Welcomes All to IHM

by Loukas Barton

Reverend Mark Andrew Thomas (known locally as “Father Mark”) recently celebrated his first anniversary as the administrative head of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Polish Hill. Prior to serving the spiritual community at IHM, Father Mark was an assistant priest at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in Oakland, one of the largest of the nearly 200 churches in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. In addition to his extensive duties and commitments to the Polish Hill parish, Father Mark continues his advocacy in Oakland, where he serves as Chaplain for both Central Catholic and Oakland Catholic schools. His ties to both Oakland and Polish Hill run much deeper than this however: though he grew up in Ross Township, the Polish side of his family (his mother’s) hails from the West End (where his grandfather ran a local watering hole); while his father’s family lived in Oakland (notably, his father played for the Pirates in the 1950s). The man knows Pittsburgh, and is deeply committed to helping the people of this city, regardless of their neighborhood, city, state, or nation of origin, to meet their spiritual needs.

At Immaculate Heart of Mary this takes a variety of forms, from orchestrating daily mass, to celebrating feast days, to saying rosaries and

convening novenas. His mission is to help maintain and nourish spiritual life, and to continue to educate folks about the faith through tradition. In his view, Church tradition is a shared process that helps people gather together as a community, and that this gathering of community through God “keeps the soul fed.”

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Church welcomes all, and encourages members of the community to participate in volunteer outreach. Engagement is often richest when like-minded folks come together to contribute, whether for community events or Holiday Mass. On this subject, Father Mark nails it by saying, “I really love a crowd!”. And so it’s up to us to create one.



Church Events

Weekly commitments to the church's community-based spiritual experience include:

Daily Mass: Monday through Saturday mornings at 8 am.

Sunday Mass: Saturday evening at 4pm; Sunday morning at 9am and 11am.

Note: the 9am Sunday morning service is conducted in Polish by Father Miro Stelmoszczyk.

Confession: Saturdays, 3-3:45, or by appointment

In addition, the Church provides a variety of seasonal services and relies on an active group of dedicated volunteers to coordinate parish outreach.

This July, IHM plans to host the annual summer festival on July 15. Outdoor food, fun, and festivities will dovetail with a Saturday evening Polka Mass! The Church always needs volunteer help to pull this off, so please get in touch!

Looking further afield, the Church has plans to run the annual Food Drive for the Thanksgiving holiday, but would also like to coordinate a food drive earlier during the calendar year. Please keep an eye open for further notification!

Updates will be posted in the Church Bulletin, the PCHA events webpage (and Blogski), and by calling the main office at 412.621.5170.

Celebrate 10 Years of the Polish Hill Arts Fest on July 16th!

Don't miss the 10th anniversary of the Polish Hill Arts Fest on July 16 from noon-9pm! There will be over 30 talented artists, including many from the neighborhood, creative hands-on activities and live music all day!

Bands include The Gotobeds, Truth and Rites, Jayke Orvis and more. Plus food to please everyone from Driftwood Oven pizza, Onion Maiden, Blacksheep Barbecue, and our own Lili and Liliput Cafes.

We still need volunteers the day of the festival!
If you want to help out, contact: kim.teplitzky@gmail.com

The PHCA's mission is to respect and preserve the sense of community in Polish Hill while promoting economic and housing development opportunities and improving the quality of life for our community.

Are you a PHCA Member?

Join or Renew Today!

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

_____ Voting Member
(Polish Hill Resident)

_____ Subscription Member
(Friend living outside the neighborhood)

Membership is just \$5, but additional donations are appreciated! Everything goes toward improving our neighborhood.
Total Membership & Donation Amount (please circle): \$5 \$15 \$30 \$50 \$125 Other:

Cut off and return to the PHCA office with cash or check payable to: *Polish Hill Civic Association*
All donations are tax deductible. All memberships expire at the end of the calendar year.