



INCLUSION | INNOVATION | IMPACT

2023 COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT



ABOUT HILLTOP ALLIANCE

Hilltop Alliance is a collaborative, community-driven organization that is guided by three pillars: Inclusion, Innovation and Impact. We are structured as a collaborative organization comprised of community-based organizations from the following eleven South Pittsburgh neighborhoods: Allentown, Arlington, Arlington Heights, Beltzhoover, Bon Air, Carrick, Knoxville, Mount Washington, Mount Oliver City, South Side Slopes, and Saint Clair, as well as Mount Oliver Borough.

To preserve and create assets in the Hilltop community through collaboration and coordination of resources

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2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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“Who would have ever thought?” is an often-used phrase at the Hilltop Alliance Board of Directors’ meetings. Long-time Board members that have been part of the organization understand the sentiment. My time with the Hilltop Alliance is ending at the end of 2024 and I’ve been reflecting on how far it has come in my 15 years as part of the organization. Although I wasn’t one of the original Board members, when I came in it was still a fledgling organization that hadn’t achieved its non-profit status.

Early programming was limited by a small staff and smaller budget. The first seeds of success included hiring an executive director, holding a Hilltop Youth Summit and completing the Green Toolbox Assessment. The Hilltop Alliance also convened four action teams: The Re-purposing Vacant Property Action Team; a Public Safety Action Team; a Community Services Coordination Action Team; and, the Keeping Homes on the Hilltop Resource Center. Out of those early programs the Alliance was able to grow and expand. The idea for the Hilltop Urban Farm came from the Green Toolbox Assessment. Re-purposing Vacant Property and Keeping Homes on the Hilltop action teams became the Property Stabilization Program and Property Stabilization Program helping over 2,500 Hilltop homeowners with everything from avoiding property citations, getting grants to make needed repairs, to providing free wills so homes could be passed along in families. Another long-time program is Fresh Fridays on the Hilltop, providing food and fresh produce to hundreds of families from April through November each year.

Through the Pennsylvania State Department of Community and Economic Development’s Neighborhood Partnership Program, the Alliance was able to expand on those services and more in Allentown, Knoxville and Mt. Oliver. In addition to the property stabilization efforts, the Alliance also provides services to the Brownsville Road and East Warrington Avenue commercial corridors. Contributions to the revitalization of the commercial districts include new business recruitment, facilitating signage grants, marketing and promotions help and event planning and support. The Hilltop Alliance’s work in Allentown helped take the commercial vacancy rate from 40 percent to less than five percent. After a years-long process, the Hilltop Alliance and its partners are poised to build 31 new affordable single-family homes in the Allentown neighborhood.

While I would like to take credit for the good work being done by the Hilltop Alliance, it is the dedication and expertise of the staff that are the heart and soul of the organization, making a difference in the Hilltop and driving the Alliance toward excellence. I’m confident those who work in and volunteer with the organization will continue to improve the Hilltop communities for those who live and work here.

Sincerely,
Tom Smith
2023 President, Board of Directors



2023

BY THE NUMBERS

OUR BUSINESS DISTRICTS

ALLENTOWN | MT. OLIVER | & KNOXVILLE

OUTREACH & PROPERTY STABILIZATION

11



new businesses opened along the E. Warrington Avenue Business Corridor

6



new businesses opened along the Brownsville Road Business Corridor

13



grants provided to Allentown small businesses

22



grants provided to Mt. Oliver-Knoxville small businesses

25+



new jobs created

10



Facade renovations completed

43

special events across Allentown and Mt. Oliver Borough

50+

businesses participated in the Passport and/or Small Business Saturday Cookie Tour

61

Home repair projects completed across ESG, HAP, & HAPI

2,050

households received fresh produce, dry goods, and dairy through Fresh Fridays

457

Hilltop residents assisted with applications for past due mortgage and utility assistance, and home repair resources

1,424

Property Maintenance issues addressed



OUR YEAR IN THE ALLENTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT

In 2023, Allentown experienced significant growth with the addition of 11 new businesses, spanning retail storefronts, art and music studios, fitness brands, and professional beauty services.



The Hilltop Alliance played a crucial role in welcoming these business owners through small business spotlights, quarterly meet-ups, providing grants, and facilitating connections to eligible programs. Nearly \$370,000 was awarded to small businesses and organizations in Allentown as part of the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) Avenues of Hope ARPA Grant in 2023. This initiative, designed to rebuild Pittsburgh's Black main streets, specifically targeted Allentown's E. Warrington Avenue and Knoxville's Brownsville Road corridors as one part of the seven Avenues of Hope across Pittsburgh. Launched in Spring 2023, the grant supported small business technical assistance as well as property investments to support inclusive growth. Seven grants were awarded in the Hilltop in the first 2 rounds in 2023, including a \$48,000 grant to our organization for Signage and Small Business Support Grants in Allentown and Knoxville.

In 2023, Hilltop Alliance awarded five Signage Grants and four Marketing Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) grants to new and existing small businesses. These grants, covering 90% of the total cost with a maximum award of \$2,500, proved instrumental in helping businesses like Dark Root Barbershop, Maya Lovro Photography & Puvithel, Leon's Caribbean Restaurant, Grim Wizard Coffee Shop, and Death Comes Lifting enhance their visibility.

In collaboration with the Hilltop Urban Farm and local businesses, Hilltop Alliance organized the Allentown Summer Market Series throughout June, July, and August. These events, featuring live music, pop-ups from Onion Maiden, Inner Groove, and Open Road, provided a platform for local entrepreneurs to showcase their offerings and explore growth opportunities. Notably, the Allentown Night Markets continued to be the largest series in the business district, attracting approximately 4,500 visitors between the June and October events.

Throughout the year, Hilltop Alliance actively engaged with community partners, sharing updates and insights at the Allentown CDC Community Meetings hosted at Inner Groove Brewing. In September, Hilltop Alliance was part of Allentown's team at the Garbage Olympics, who won first place for the second year in a row. We continue to partner with Allentown CDC on events, advocacy, communications and social media campaigns.

HILLTOP COLLABORATIONS

In 2023, we continued intentional collaborations between Allentown and Mt. Oliver-Knoxville. Quarterly business owner meet-ups were held throughout the Hilltop averaging 35 attendees at each event. This was our second year for our holiday shopping Passport Program with 53 participating businesses across Allentown, Mt. Oliver, Knoxville and Arlington.

This passport punch card awards prizes to shoppers that make purchases at 10 different businesses during the promotional period. Allentown and Mt. Oliver also collaborated on the 2nd Annual Cookie Tour on Small Business Saturday. We designed and secured the necessary permitting for Gateway Signage in Allentown and Mt. Oliver, which will be two directional signs placed at the entrance of the E. Warrington Avenue business corridor and the entrance of the Mt. Oliver Borough business district. The signs will help small businesses because it helps with branding and increases awareness.

OUR YEAR IN THE MT OLIVER BUSINESS DISTRICT

In partnership with the Hilltop Economic Development Corporation (HEDC), Hilltop Alliance continued efforts in the 100-200 block of Brownsville Road while expanding to the 300-800 block. In 2023, there were 6 new businesses in Mt Oliver and Knoxville including Brown Bear Bread Cafe, 6Sixx Details, Tech 25, S&F Cafe, Redeyes Inc, and Stahl Plumbing and Drain.

The Rent Abatement grants continue to help support and incentivize new business with five grants awarded. The Cheese Queen and Phenomenal Canine were awarded Year 2 Rent Abatement Grants, which continue support at a lower rate while businesses become fully sustainable. Seven small businesses received Marketing Technical Assistance Program grants which paired them with a professional marketing expert to further their reach and customer base. While the outreach continues in Knoxville, 6Sixx Details is a new car detailing shop that received both a Rent Abatement Grant and a Marketing Technical Assistance Grant.

Over a four-part series in 2023, First Sip Studios presented the Digital Marketing Workshop Series, a free program for small business owners to learn more about identifying a target audience, content calendars, leveraging photography and video, and analytics. These were hosted at the Mt Oliver Fire Hall and Flavor of Puerto Rico.

The Summer LIVE Music Series continued with weekly entertainment at the Deck (150 Brownsville Road) every weekend from June through August. One notable addition

to the summer event calendar was the Art Walk in June, planned in collaboration with Diivinetimes Productions LLC and PLEE Projects. This event had over 20 vendors pop-up along Brownsville Road as well as live entertainment, sidewalk sales from storefronts and live entertainment. In the Fall, the second annual Hilltop Harvest Fest, the Halloween Walk and Light Up Night were key events. In November, the Borough hosted a Cookie Contest with seven contestants and judges Chef Janet Loughran and Chef Alekka Sweeney of TalkPittsburgh. HEDC donated \$500 to the charity of the winner's choice, the Boys and Girls Club of Western Pennsylvania, during this season of giving.

As we have expanded efforts to Knoxville, we are working with the Knoxville Community Council to place a neighborhood sign at the intersection of Knox Avenue and Bausman Street. Once the permissions go through the City permitting process, they will receive a Signage Grant.



PROPERTY STABILIZATION & SUPPORT SERVICES



BEFORE



AFTER



Our Property Stabilization Program (PSP) aims to resolve and prevent property maintenance issues on the Hilltop. This helps keep owners in their homes and preserves existing assets through assisting qualifying Hilltop homeowners with home repair and property maintenance needs. At a neighborhood level, we organize neighborhood cleanups and identify/monitor other maintenance issues, such as dumping and overgrowth. Working hand-in-hand with various departments of the URA, City of Pittsburgh and Mt. Oliver Borough, nonprofit partners, local judiciary, and neighbors, PSP has had great impact over the years, but 2023 stands out as the PSP Team's best year.

We completed 61 home repair projects totaling almost \$500,000, over 25% more than last year. Of these projects, 42 were Emergency Stabilization grants funded through tax credit partner, private foundation, and governmental sources. Our existing relationship with the URA as the Hilltop's program administrator for the City of Pittsburgh Housing Opportunity Fund's Homeowner Assistance Program (HAP), which provides up to \$35,000 per home for priority home repairs, added 12 projects. In addition to HAPs, we are now actively involved in more Home Accessibility Program for Independence (HAPI) projects with the URA in our City neighborhoods, with 7 completed in 2023. HAPI allows qualifying

homeowners to receive up to \$15,000 in home repairs related to medical conditions. Combining these projects with neighborhood cleanups and other property maintenance interventions, 1,424 residential properties received some form of property stabilization assistance from Hilltop Alliance.

Some increased assistance this year stems from a new partnership with the Carrick Community Council to help increase its capacity in neighborhood revitalization by facilitating targeted property maintenance efforts. We hired a Carrick Coordinator in April 2023 who organizes neighborhood cleanups, works with Carrick residents to find and mitigate property maintenance issues, and connects them to home repair assistance.

2023 brought expansion of our work; we helped over 450 Hilltop residents apply for the Pennsylvania Homeowner Assistance Fund (PAHAF), which provides up to \$50,000 in assistance toward delinquent utility bills, mortgage payments, and property taxes. We actively promoted Pennsylvania's Whole-Home Repair Program (WHRP) and helped around 170 Hilltop homeowners apply during the application periods. WHRP is in the pilot stage and aims to provide eligible homeowners with up to \$50,000 in repairs per owner-occupied unit to address habitability and safety concerns, provide measures to improve energy or water efficiency, and make units accessible for individuals with disabilities. We also referred Mt. Oliver Borough residents, who are not eligible for URA programs, to the Allegheny Home Improvement Loan Program (AHILP), which is a low-interest loan of up to \$23,000 towards home repair and improvements for income-eligible applicants.

FRESH FRIDAYS ON THE HILLTOP & FOOD ACCESS



On the afternoons of each second Friday in April to November 2023, Hilltop Alliance distributed seasonal fresh produce and dairy items as well as an assortment of dry goods to 2,050 Hilltop residents. Building upon 2022's addition of pet food to the Fresh Friday options, Animal Friends joined Biggies Bullies to provide additional pet food as well as pet supplies throughout 2023. We also began a partnership with 412 Food Rescue to deliver Fresh Fridays to neighbors we know are physically unable to make the event.

Since 2014, Fresh Friday has become an effective means to both distribute food to Hilltop residents and connect them to other

food distribution resources by involving those resources in our monthly event. While this has long been the case with our original partners Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank and the Brashear Association, new opportunities have arisen for other Hilltop-focused organizations as well, such as Abiding Missions and Washington Heights Ecumenical Food Pantry. Together we are able to multiply the availability of free fresh food for those Hilltop residents who would struggle to get it otherwise.



HILLTOP CARES

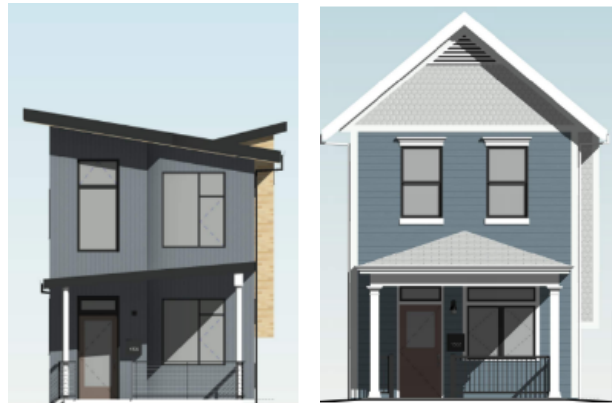
Intended to become an annual daylong event, in 2023 we invited the Hilltop neighborhood organizations to nominate a home in their neighborhood for no-cost exterior home and yard beautification work. The Carrick and Knoxville community councils responded and Hilltop Alliance staff and contractor Go Supreme performed projects including full yard landscaping, garbage removal, and repainting. Neighbors of these two homes immediately noted the dramatic impact on these properties and their streets.

We hope to see this one-day initiative expand in 2024 with more neighborhoods, contractors, sponsors and volunteers collaborating in order to allow us to target one home in each of the Hilltop neighborhoods.



GRANDVIEW SOUTH HOMES PROJECT

In response to the area-wide need for affordable housing, community feedback and engagement, and our 2013 Hilltop Housing Strategy's prioritization of Allentown for vacant property recycling, Hilltop Alliance, along with the City of Pittsburgh, Urban Redevelopment Authority, and Mount Washington Community Development Corporation, assembled 33 vacant buildable lots in Allentown's "Grandview South" area between E. Warrington Avenue and Grandview Park. Since 2014, with input and guidance from Allentown Community Development Corporation, Hilltop Alliance and Gatesburg Road Development have been designing 31 single-family homes for these lots.



After the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency awarded Grandview South Homes tax credits in October 2021, the project has seen the completion of pre-development planning, zoning, permitting, surveying, pre-demolition and environmental studies, three of the eight required demolitions, and some preliminary site clearing. Home construction is now expected to begin in 2024, with leasing to begin shortly thereafter.

The 31 new lease-to-own homes will include 23 two-bedroom units and 8 three-bedroom units; four will be accessible and meet ADA standards. Based on federal guidelines for household size and income (between 20%-60% area median income), monthly rent amounts including all electric, water and sewer utilities are anticipated to be approximately \$400-950/month for 2-bedroom homes and \$1,100/month for 3-bedroom homes.



2023



NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS:

ALLENTOWN



KNOXVILLE & MT. OLIVER BOROUGH



MAJOR SUPPORTERS:



PNC Charitable Trusts Fred & Gilda Nobel Foundation
Jack Buncher Foundation

PARTNERS:

412 Food Rescue	Mary, Queen of Piece Parish
Abiding Missions	Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group
American Wills & Estates Animal Friends	Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
Biggies Bullies	PULSE RE360
The Brashear Association	St. Paul AME Church
Friends of South Side Park	Sister's Place Inc.
Gatesburg Road Development	Sto-Rox Neighborhood Health Council, Inc.
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank	Three Rivers Waterkeeper
Hilltop Community Health Center	TrailBlaze Creative
Hilltop Rising LLC	Washington Heights
Hilltop Urban Farm	Ecumenical Food Bank
Hill Top UM Church	The Weeping Glass
Just Harvest	

SUPPORTERS:

NeighborWorks of Western PA
New Sun Rising
Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh
State Senator Jay Costa
State Senator Wayne Fontana
State Representative Jessica Benham
State Representative Aerion Abney
Mayor Ed Gainey
City Councilman Bruce Kraus
City Councilman Anthony Coghill

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