

NAP/NPP Legislative Hearing

Testimony Of

Jerome Jackson

Good morning, my name is Jerome Jackson, Executive Director of Operation Better Block (OBB) serving the community of Homewood located in the East End of Pittsburgh. First, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address this committee.

I would like to briefly talk about the impact the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) has had on the community of Homewood and our residents.

From our vision and dream to position OBB to submit an application for NPP tax credit funding. Which pushed me and OBB staff to create the Homewood vacant property and land use plan, known as, the Homewood cluster plan. This planning process focused on engaging residents in the process. We engaged 2600 out of 2700 households in Homewood, through cluster meeting attendance, door-to-door outreach, mailings emails, and phone calls. The Homewood Cluster Plan was the foundation that lead to Homewood's first ever NPP award.

The work of OBB, the implementation of the Cluster Plan and the development of Homewood rely heavily on our NPP funding. We have used the funding for the following work or services.

Tangled Title: Explain how funds are used and the importance of providing this service for residents.

Database: Explain how our database works and how it will be used as a development tool.

Property Acquisition: Explain the importance this has on the Cluster Plan implementation.

Renovation of Residents Homes: Explain the importance this has for resident and the implementation of the Cluster Plan.

Supporting Other Organizations: Explain how funding activities of other organizations supports the Cluster Plan and benefits residents of Homewood.

None of this work is possible without the work and dedication of Operation Better Block staff. The above mentioned work is the responsibility of OBB staff. NPP funding helps pay for a good portion of staff salaries and benefits.

Tracy Evans

PA House Finance Committee Hearing on HB 2213

Thursday - August 25 at 9:30 a.m.
Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania
Robert S. Foltz Building

Representative Jake Wheatley, House Democratic Chair

Thank you for convening this policy hearing on the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP).

In 2008, the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation (WCDC) was founded to promote the revitalization of Wilkinsburg. Located in Wilkinsburg's central business district, one of our primary activities includes implementing a 10-year Business District Revitalization Plan to enhance Wilkinsburg's business district, encourage development, revitalize and restore vacant structures, and stabilize the community.

The Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation was able to open our office in June of 2010. We were able to hire an executive director and office manager. Our budget that first year was slightly over \$300,000.

Because of the Neighborhood Partnership Program.

Since the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation opened in 2010, 57 business district properties have sold, 21 property owners have renovated their building facades, and 22 vacant storefronts have been filled. Two hundred and sixty seven residents have received small business training and 31 new businesses have located in Wilkinsburg.

With our housing partners, 66 units of affordable housing have been created, 10 new housing units constructed, and 9 blighted properties cleared. Forty one vacant properties became available to new owners through the Vacant Property Recovery Program, and 24 homeowners received critical home repairs through the Wilkinsburg Affordable Housing Coalition.

We have generated 250 positive press articles about Wilkinsburg and helped 2,091 youth achieve their educational and civic goals by providing grants and marketing assistance to support local summer and afterschool programs.

Because of the Neighborhood Partnership Program.

For the first time in over five decades, Wilkinsburg's population has seen a 1.5% increase, residential real estate sales are up 37.5%, and workforce numbers have increased by 33.6%. Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation is central in the efforts to revitalize Wilkinsburg, turn decline into renewal, and increase investment.

In May of 2015, a majority of Wilkinsburg voters voted to allow liquor licenses in our borough for the first time since 1935. We now have two restaurants with licenses in Wilkinsburg.

In 2015, Wilkinsburg was accepted into the prestigious Main Street Program. In 2016, we received National Main Street designation.

Today, we have a staff of six with an annual budget of more than \$1 million and are engaged in a \$3 million capital campaign to restore the historic Wilkinsburg Train Station.

Because of the Neighborhood Partnership Program.

Since 2010, the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation has been fortunate to receive \$2,279,000 in corporate contributions through the Neighborhood Partnership Program. The Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation has leveraged \$7,127,111 in support from foundations, corporations, and private contributions. \$228,000 has been contributed by local businesses, organizations, and individuals.

We have tracked over \$65.5 million in investment in Wilkinsburg since 2010.

We have a very aggressive five-year strategic plan that addresses key development projects, infrastructure rebuilding, and advocacy for civic leadership and community partnerships. The Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation and Wilkinsburg's leaders have a well demonstrated commitment to working together to improve our community, and the Neighborhood Partnership Program is a crucial component to realizing our long term plans.