

OHI Journal

Newsletter for the Friends and Neighbors of Observatory Hill

Winter 2021



Five Points Project

Our development corporation began construction on the two million-dollar Five Points Project (3917, 3919, 3921, 3923 & 3925 Perrysville Avenue).

We experienced numerous snags consisting of contractor issues, funding issues and then COVID issues. We had a state grant held up due to an administrative snafu but that was resolved. Due to COVID, we had a bank back out on us as they did not want to fund another restaurant in these uncertain times. We thank First National Bank for stepping in and giving us a loan.

These spaces will see six new apartments and four new commercial tenants. Thanks to the Urban Redevelopment Authority and monies received from the Housing Opportunity Fund, two of the apartments will be rented to households with incomes at or below 31% of the area median income and the other four apartments will be rented to households with incomes at or below 50% of the area median income.

Mr. Bill's restaurant space will be split in two and will house two tenants. See our interview on page two with the owners of IDA's Sandwich Shop which will occupy 3921 Perrysville Avenue. We are excited and happy to see Observatory Hill residents as new tenants and business owners. Let's do all we can to support them.

Bonvue Revitalization Project: Phase II

Phase II of the Bonvue Street Revitalization includes the rehabbing of a second set of five houses which will be revitalized for new homeownership. Bonvue homeowners and board members attended a zoning hearing to request a variance to add off street parking pads. The zoning board approved our request and granted permission to proceed. A contractor has been chosen and the final finance meeting with the Urban Redevelopment Authority took place in November and the URA entered into agreements with our development corporation in the amount of \$656,864. This project will be a minimum of a \$1.3 million investment.

Conservatorship Project

Progress is being made with our conservatorship property - the former Lamb of God Church and adjoining apartments. An Asbestos survey was completed. Roof repairs were done, open windows were boarded, locks were changed and the building was secured. A landscaper is under contract to mow the lawn and maintain the sidewalks in winter. A contractor performed masonry work and removed loose bricks and railings from the crumbling balconies.

Selective demo was completed on the apartments which sustained fire, smoke and water damage. This opened up walls and ceilings to expose damage in order to make an assessment on the structure. We have authorized additional spending for our architect to perform an existing conditions work up which will enable us to proceed with next steps. The results of these findings will help us to determine if the apartments can be salvaged and if they can, at what cost. Since February of 2019, we have spent \$99,615.75. While there is a lot of work needed on this large space, we are excited for the possibilities.

The police will be using these buildings to train their upcoming batch of canine officers. Training exercises will be conducted from the end of January through the end of February. Do not be alarmed. There will be both day and night time exercises.



Small Business Spotlight on IDA's Sandwich Shop

By Jeremy Lawler

It's one thing to open a new business in the middle of a pandemic. It's another to do so in a business district that is in the beginnings of some very drastic changes.

Erica Sumpter and Charla Thomas, both Observatory Hill entrepreneurs, put their heads together well over two years ago with the idea of one day opening a small neighborhood cafe and sandwich shop. Today, this big idea has transformed into a full-blown reality. Ida's Sandwich Shop will fill a portion of the space in one of the Five Points buildings, formerly Mr. Bill's Tavern.

"After the passing of Charla's mother, Ms. Ida Quinn, who was a resident of the Northside for more than 40 years, it was only natural to name our business after her," Sumpter said.

The namesake will honor Ms. Quinn for years to come and become a staple of our business district. Ida's is a merge of two families joining together to make a legacy of a lifelong resident of the Northside live on, through community engagement and wholesome recipes.

Ida's will open with the idea of becoming more than just a coffee and sandwich shop. Owners Sumpter and Thomas hope Ida's will be a place, post pandemic, that will provide our neighbors the opportunity to grab a cup of coffee and a sandwich - a place to have a quick meeting to discuss neighborhood issues - or a place to take families to grab a quick breakfast.

"We want to have a space where you can house a neighborhood meeting after hours or host your next local event," said Sumpter. "We want Ida's to bring back that small neighborhood community feel, where all feel welcome, no matter their race, sexual orientation, religion or gender. We want Ida's customers to feel like a part of

a larger community and build a warm, friendly atmosphere where it's not uncommon to know who is walking in and out of the shop at any given time."

Ida's will be a small, but quaint space in the Five Points building. Designed as a space to get food on the go, or space to eat lunch and conduct work, Ida's will feature a simplistic, but warm atmosphere with a touch of Observatory Hill memories.

Ida's will open in Spring 2021. Menus will be shared to both Ida's Facebook and Instagram pages. Menu must-haves are the 34 Engine Fire Station sandwich and the Northside Po Boy. For more information, the owners can be contacted at info@idassandwichshop.com.

Hours:

Monday - Friday – 7 am to 5 pm

Saturday – 8 am to 3 pm

Sunday – closed



Current construction outside of 3921 Perrysville Avenue, which will be the future home of Ida's



From the Desk of the Treasurer

By Leslee Schaffer

Hello everyone,

Over the past few months, we have had some inquiries as to why we did not send out our annual membership packets. Due to the pandemic, the high employment and the financial struggles plaguing the economy, we did not want to send out a fundraising letter asking for a donation. It did not feel appropriate.

Thanks both to our house tour committee for organizing successful house tours and to the City of Pittsburgh which made grants available to offset some operating costs, we have enjoyed financial stability and have had a healthy cash flow. Because of COVID, we cancelled our house tour last year and will also cancel it again this year and will focus our attention on 2022.

Looking ahead, not having these fundraisers for two years will impact our finances. The grants from the City which were made available to us, are no longer there. Fixed costs we must pay total around \$5,000 annually and include liability insurances on our lots and properties, post office box rental since we have no office space to receive mail, postage costs, maintenance costs on our lots to keep overgrowth in check, annual Tracfone subscription, etc. If we choose to do a newsletter mailing to the neighborhood, those are added costs. Looking ahead, we have additional expenses that we normally would not have. For example, we put 20 Mairdale Street (pictured above) in a treasurer sale and that cost is \$2,700 to get it processed and removed. It is a blighted, abandoned and condemned house in our business district and we had no choice but to address it. Leaving it would invite crime and would work against our vision of revitalization for our commercial corridor. Because it is so damaged, it will be demolished.

Our fundraising committee is brainstorming some virtual fundraisers this year as we adapt to this new normal. Included in this newsletter is a membership renewal form should you wish to renew your membership. As always, we thank you for your ongoing support as we focus on making our neighborhood an even better place to live and work.



Riverview Church Thrift Store Needs Volunteers



Our local thrift store located in our Perrysville Avenue business district is looking for volunteers. As they gear up to reopen in 2021 when it is safer in this pandemic, they are in need of some new volunteers to help stock shelves and to serve customers. This store serves as a mission to the neighborhood by offering low cost clothing and housewares. If you have some free time and can work short shifts on a regular basis, please contact Mary Anne Klein at **412-953-1420** for more information.



A Word from the Mayor's Office

The Office of Mayor Peduto hopes that this message finds all residents safe and healthy. In the last several months, the City of Pittsburgh has announced several efforts and initiatives that impact the Observatory Hill neighborhood.

Funding for affordable housing in Observatory Hill owned by the Observatory Hill Development Corporation was given a significant boost by the Urban

Redevelopment Authority. \$1.8 million dollars has been earmarked for landslide remediation in Riverview Park. The City and the URA have partnered to launch Avenues of Hope, which seeks to invest in existing small businesses and residents, supporting the inclusive growth of these neighborhoods. Perrysville Avenue is included in the initiative.

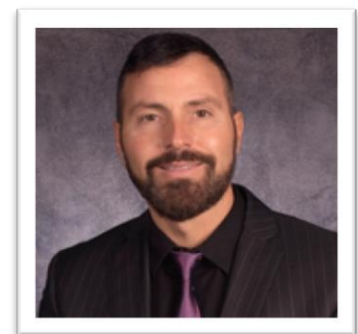
Community Announcements from the Mayor's Office:

- The City of Pittsburgh Snow Angels program is now accepting sign-ups for volunteers and neighbors in need. Snow Angels pairs residents who are willing to help shovel and salt their neighbor's sidewalks in the winter with those who need some assistance. Volunteer or request help by calling 311 or visiting pittsburghpa.gov/snow-angels.
- Mayor Peduto delivered proposed 2021 Operating and Capital Budgets to City Council on 11/9/2020. You can learn more about what's in the proposed budgets, challenges posed by COVID-19, and how to engage with the budget this year by visiting pittsburghpa.gov/omb.

Thank you to all City of Pittsburgh residents for remaining resilient, patient, and innovative during this time. We hope that you have a safe holiday season. If you have any questions, please reach out to the City of Pittsburgh Office of Community Affairs at 412-255-4773 or call 311.

Perry High School Welcomes New Principal

A public educator for 21 years, Dr. Robert "Bob" Frioni is the newly appointed Principal of Perry High School. He began his educational career in 1999 teaching both secondary-level English and Social Studies at Pittsburgh Public Schools and Norwin School District. In 2006, Dr. Frioni accepted his first administrative position of Vice Principal at John A. Brashear High School. After Brashear, Dr. Frioni went on to serve as the instructional leader of Fort Cherry Junior/Senior High School (regular and alternative education programs) and Steel Center Area Vocational Technical School.



His experience spans highly diverse urban, suburban, and rural school systems, inclusive of alternative and career-technical programs. Dr. Frioni holds a Bachelor of Arts from Washington & Jefferson and earned a Doctor of Education and Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Pittsburgh.

Dr. Frioni has already attended an OHI meeting to introduce himself to us and to our neighborhood. He enthusiastically shared his vision and his goals for the school and we are excited for this new direction and look forward to working with him.

Byzantine Catholic Seminary Celebrates 70 Years!



Congratulations to the Byzantine Catholic Seminary for celebrating its 70th year. Founded in 1950, the seminary recently received a 10-year accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools after a three-day comprehensive evaluation, which “ensures that institutions of higher education function according to standards of institutional and educational quality.”

The seminary currently has 12 men in its resident Priestly Formation Program along with 30 men and women in its School of Theology, most of whom are taking their courses on line.

School Support from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

This year, students (and their parents!) are facing many new challenges. Whether your kids are attending school in person, at home or online, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh is here to support you:

- All locations are open for limited computer use and printing
- Access free homework assistance with your CLP card at Tutor.com, where students can work with a live tutor
- Research databases for kids and teens and remote learning support can be found at www.carnegielibrary.org/homework-help
- Apply for a library card easily online or at your local Library branch
- If you need help navigating these resources or using a remote learning device, call 412-622-3114 to schedule a one-on-one telephone appointment with a librarian

While our locations may look different on the inside, the heart of the Library hasn't changed. We look forward to connecting and discovering with you in new ways!

Welcome to the Neighborhood Project Pride

The board of directors of Allen Place Community Services (formerly Chatham Elementary School) announced the sale of their building to new owner, Robert Howard II, President and CEO of Project Pride, Inc. The mission of Project Pride is to provide programming and resources that educates and prepares under-served youth and adults to overcome barriers to success. Earning both his bachelor and MBA degrees from Point Park University, Mr. Howard is currently a teacher at Perry High School and plans to house education and civic service programming to students and adults in our community from their new location at 227 Bonvue Street.

Dr. Milton and Jerry Ann Allen will remain in the building as tenants so they may continue to focus on projects and programs to serve our neighborhood. They had a busy year working with local food banks and delivering boxes and baskets of food to thankful neighbors. If you or someone you know has food insecurities and is interested in receiving a food distribution, please contact Allen Place at 412.231.1531 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays between the hours of 9am and 2pm to get information on their food bank.



By Mark P. Masterson, Friends of Riverview Park, Chair

Public Works Depot Relocation

Friends of Riverview Park has been advocating for the removal of the Public Works depot from Riverview Park. The depot has had a detrimental impact on Riverview Park, as picnic groves and other areas have been taken over for storage of materials not related to the Park. There is also a waste transfer and recycling transfer function that has had severe negative impacts on the Grand Avenue/Kilbuck portion of the Park.

- 1) CEC, Inc. and IKM Architects volunteered their services to lead a 'visioning' process for the community to gather ideas about what should be done in that portion of the Park. The process kicked off on Monday March 2nd with a community meeting at Providence Connections. Follow-up meetings were cancelled due to COVID – but the committee is looking to get the process started again in the spring or summer of 2021.
- 2) The City has committed to reducing its 'footprint' in the park by slowly removing materials stored in various locations in the Park.
- 3) The City has agreed to relocate the public works function to a site that it owns on the Northside. There was \$500,000 in the 2020 Capital Budget for the design of the facility. It is hoped that the public works facility can be constructed and occupied within the next two or three years.

Woods Run Stormwater Management Project

- 1.) Phase I of the PWSA's Woods Run Project is complete. The section along Riverview Avenue centered on Horseshoe Bend and involved installing a tiered system of rain gardens along the side of the road. You can walk along Riverview Drive to view up close and personal. There was a small landslide in the retaining pond at Horseshoe Bend that will be repaired in the summer of 2021 along with some adjustments to the rip-rap stone that covers the hillside below this feature.
- 2.) Phase II of the project involves work extending Woods Run under the road way and along Mairdale Street. PWSA has reduced the scope of the work, mainly by eliminating some of the storm water features along Mairdale Street -but many of the park improvement features will still be constructed.

We want to thank Councilman Wilson and the Mayor's Office for helping to keep many of the most visible items in the project. With their help, we will see walkways, interpretive signage, extension of the stream under the roadway into the park, stone facing on the culvert under Mairdale/Riverview Avenue, benches, improved trails, and improved parking to make the connection between the park and the neighborhood much better. The City, with the help of State Senator Wayne Fontana and former State Representative Adam Ravenstahl, received a state grant of \$200,000 to help fund those enhancements.

Davis Avenue Bridge

The FOR Park has been advocating for a new bike and pedestrian bridge to reconnect the Northside's largest neighborhood, Brighton Heights, with its largest Park. In February 2019, the City determined that the cost of doing a bike/pedestrian bridge now made this a feasible project. It also alleviated some of the concerns that residents along Davis Avenue had about increased motor vehicle traffic. The City received funding from the state Dept. of Community and Economic Development, with the support of Senator Fontana and Representative Ravenstahl, to help pay for design work on the bridge. We expect that the City will begin a public input process in 2021.

FOR Park is a committee of the Northside Leadership Conference. We work in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. You can get more info by following us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfRiverviewPark/>



Observatory Hill Participates in Garbage Olympics

We thank everyone who got up early on a sunny morning in September to participate in the Garbage Olympics. This annual citywide garbage collecting competition is sponsored by the City of Pittsburgh and they provided all the supplies needed to make this a successful event. We were able to gather up a giant pile of garbage and tires from a variety of areas in our neighborhood. While we did not win the competition this year, we had a great time working together and taking pride in our neighborhood. We thank team captain Doug Deckert, Chris Mitchell, Public Works, the City of Pittsburgh and Bobby Wilson's office for treating us to lunch. Observatory Hill volunteers are the best! Thank you!!!



COMMUNITY MEANS SO MANY THINGS TO SO MANY PEOPLE, AND THE WORLD TO US.

IN ALL WE DO AND ALL WE SAY, WE'RE ALL FOR COMMUNITY.

2020 – What a Year It Was!

While COVID 19 interrupted our lives and cancelled our normal activities and fundraisers in 2020, our board of directors continued to work to make progress with the goals we set for our neighborhood.

We gained several new board members adding fresh ideas and perspectives. This year, we have a full house with 13 board members and will reorganize and stream line our committees to be more efficient.

To help the neighborhood during the pandemic, we donated \$1500 to the food bank at the Riverview United Presbyterian Church. We also donated \$1,500 to the Observatory Hill Deli which paid for 100 meals consisting of a hoagie, chips, homemade pie and a drink. We were glad to partner with owners, Michael and Antoinette Payne, to provide meals to thankful neighbors.

2021: The Year Ahead

Due to the pandemic, our House Tour Committee has decided to cancel this year's house tour. We are mindful that homeowners are not comfortable opening their homes. In addition, we solicit local businesses to pay for an ad in our house tour booklet. With so many businesses hurting, we do not want to add to their burdens by seeking out these business sponsorships during this difficult time.

Our monthly board meetings are now being held via Zoom at 7pm on the third Wednesday of each month. If you would like to attend, please email us at ohipgh@gmail.com for the invite details. All neighbors and stakeholders are encouraged to attend. Get updates from Zone One police, from our elected officials and from the various committees which comprise our board.

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OBSERVATORY HILL INC
PO BOX 100247
PITTSBURGH PA 15233

Phone: 412.736.2489
Email: ohipgh@gmail.com
Website: www.observatoryhill.net
Facebook: Observatory Hill Inc
Twitter: @ohipgh

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ANNUAL REGISTRATION FORM FOR MEMBERSHIP TO OHI

Mail to: Observatory Hill, Inc.
PO Box 100247
Pittsburgh PA 15233

Member's Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Date Paid: _____

Email Address: _____

Membership Contribution: (check one)

_____ \$5.00 _____ \$10.00 _____ \$20.00 _____ Other

_____ Please include me on the list to receive monthly emails and OHI updates