

From the Office of Council Member Natalia Rudiak

“Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me... Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.”

— Shel Silverstein

Here's How I am Working to make Pittsburgh a better place, every day...

-December is busy for all of us. On the Council floor, it's Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's and Budget season! For us, December isn't just about the holidays it's about passing a budget. Almost 600 million dollars, and we get to think about every single one!

- Every Department, Bureau and agency in the city has its own budget hearing
- As chair of the Finance and Law Committee I spent up to 8 hours daily at the Council table parsing through each line item and detail about how our 500 million-dollar + budget will be allocated.
- Working w Council Colleagues to ensure we meet as many spending priorities are met, while balancing our 5 year plan for recovery from Act 47. This budget process included tough conversations around the city's millage rate, parking meter rates, permit and licensing fees, and capital budget projects.
- In the end, after working with colleagues, we passed a 516.6 million dollar operating budget and 76.6 million capital budget, to keep our city running through 2015.
- Delivered annual budget address to council as chair of the Finance and Law Committee. You can see full text of speech below .

-I am passionate about pre-K and providing every child with a solid foundation to grow into their full potential. Did you know that at-risk children without high quality pre-k education are 70% more likely to commit violent crimes and 50% more likely to drop out of school? That's why I'm working hard to make sure every child gets a quality early childhood experience:

- Passed a comprehensive package of legislation to address the needs of families and their childcare providers in the City of Pittsburgh. Read article below to learn more.
- Taped a segment for KDKA's Sunday business page regarding the work of the Women's Caucus of City Council. The segment aired Sunday, 12/28 at 6:30AM. Check local listings for replays!
- Read holiday stories to 3- and 4-year-olds at the Small World Early Learning Center in downtown Pittsburgh

-Questioned then-Acting Police Chief Cameron McLay during his confirmation hearing in December - I interviewed him on how entertainment districts like the South Side drain resources from other parts of South Pittsburgh, use-of-force policies, the police residency requirement, and how we can encourage women and people of color to join the force. Chief McLay sees officers as “peace officers” and wants to encourage officers to work with tools that include more than handcuffs and firearms. He said of the Bureau of

Police, "The predominant paradigm needs to be one of Community Service." You can read Chief McClay's Open Letter to the Community here: <http://newpittsburghcourieronline.com/2014/12/23/an-open-letter-to-the-community/>

-Attended a fundraiser for fired UPMC workers...This November, illegally fired UPMC workers Jim Staus, Ron Oakes and Al Turner rejected UPMC's offer of big money to walk away from their colleagues and their fight to form their union. Within weeks, their courage was vindicated when a federal administrative judge ruled that "UPMC Presbyterian-Shadyside has engaged in such egregious and widespread misconduct so as to demonstrate a general disregard for employees' statutory rights," and ordered UPMC to put them back to work and pay them all the wages they would have earned since the time of their firing. UPMC is appealing but in the meantime, Jim, Ron, and Al are still feeling the effects of losing their jobs. I personally contributed to their cause to help keep them and their families on their feet. If you would like to contribute, please do at this link: www.bit.ly/HolidaySolidarity. Thank you, Jim, Ron and Al for standing up for our city!

-Shoutout to Brittany Baxter, Carrick resident and 10th Grader at City High who shadowed me one Thursday in December, she had a whirlwind tour of the city, met mayor, county executive, governor elect and more... all in one day. She said of our time together: "I had the best day with you yesterday. I hope to repeat it sometime (:". High school students: Are you interested in shadowing Council Member Rudiak? Contact our office at 412-255-2131.

-I also attended the New Voices Pittsburgh 10 Year Anniversary celebration, enjoyed the holiday parties for Brookline Chamber of Commerce and Brookline Block Watch, the African American Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce reception, and more...

Budget Address to Council

Every year, Council takes up the challenging task of balancing and passing two budgets for the City. The Capital Budget pays for brick-and-mortar projects like paving roads, bridge repair, and parks improvements, while the Operating Budget pays for employee salaries, benefits, supplies, and regular maintenance of buildings and equipment. You can see an archive of current and historical budgets here: <http://pittsburghpa.gov/information/budget>.

This year was especially important because Council was tasked with working with the Act 47 coordinators and the Mayor to pass a new 5-year financial plan. "Act 47" refers to the Financially Distressed Municipalities Act, a Pennsylvania law that enables the State Department of Community and Economic Development to declare cities and municipalities as "financially distressed." This designation provides the City with state-appointed overseers to hold the City to certain standards, and technical assistance to improve our financial standing. The City was first declared "financially distressed" in 2004, after the City's credit rating was downgraded to below "junk bond" status, and the City was forced to lay off 446 full and part-time employees in 2003. The good news is that in the years since, Pittsburgh has made significant strides in improving our financial footing. Just this year, I worked with our finance team Standard & Poor's upgraded the City's bond rating to "A+ stable", which means that it will cost the City significantly less to borrow money in the future. It also enabled the city to refinance existing debt, and save money on interest, just as you might do with a mortgage. You can read the updated Act 47 5-year plan

here: https://www.pfm.com/uploadedFiles/Content/Knowledge_Center/Whitepapers_Articles_Commentary/Commentary/City%20of%20Pittsburgh%20-%202014%20Amended%20Recovery%20Plan.pdf

One of the most hotly debated budget issues this year was the millage adjustment. The millage rate was adjusted from 7.56 to 8.06 mills. This is the lowest possible correction to the 2013 tax rate that ensures the City will have enough revenue to provide services; there is no windfall.

The 2013 tax cut reduced average homeowners taxes by about \$240 annually. We are restoring less than \$20-40 of the reduction. In other words, the average homeowner's tax bill will still be about \$200 lower than in 2012.

For more information on the millage adjustment issue, please see this Powerpoint from Finance Director Paul Leger, explaining the nuts and bolts of the situation: http://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/finance/Mill_Levy_NEWEST.pdf

As Chair of the Finance & Law Committee, Councilwoman Rudiak led Council's discussion and debate on these on budget issues. She gave the following address to her Council colleagues after final passage of the Budget in December:

"First I would like to say that it has been an honor and privilege to serve as City Council's finance chair under President Kraus' leadership during this very challenging year.

We began the year with the fanfare of the hopes and dreams of a new administration taking the helm. In February, to accommodate Mayor William Peduto's vision, we collaboratively amended the budget, changing positions, departments and processes. In March, the Commonwealth Department of Community and Economic Development declared that the City would remain in state oversight and would have to put forward a new Act 47 plan. Through the formulation of that plan, Council realized the "unintended" consequences of actions taken during the previous administration:

1. That the result of the Pension Board lowering the Assumed Rate of Return from 8% to 7.5% at its December meeting - along with the mandated experience study - would have a budgetary impact of \$11.5 million.
2. That the Real Estate millage rate - along with an increased homestead exemption - was set one half a mill too low in 2012, causing nearly an \$8 million shortfall in our largest revenue source.

With our sleeves rolled up, members of this City Council worked together and we met the challenge and passed a comprehensive Act 47 plan on June 14. This plan put together the framework to address many of our long term problems as well as the short term needs to avert unsustainable deficit spending. But the work had just begun.

In August, along with the administration I met with bond rating agencies and showed the financial progress the City had made and the collaboration that exists between the new administration and Council. This resulted in an outlook upgrade from stable to positive giving us an A1 rating from Moody's on our \$50 million capital borrowing that will fund the 2015 and 2016 budgets. A few weeks later, Council discussed a forward refinancing that the administration proposed, yet I and other members were uneasy with the structure of refinance. As a result of discussions with the Mayor, the refunding was pulled; this action and type of cooperation was unprecedented with prior City administrations. We - Council and the Mayoral administration - did the refunding at a later date, with a different structure, reducing the City's total debt, saving more than \$3 million and better preserving the City's long-term borrowing opportunities. We collectively began working on the budget early this year, with discussions on the Capital Budget happening through the Capital Project Committee every quarter, that included participation from our City Controller, Operations Director, City Planning and Public Works Director. We had citizen meetings throughout our neighborhoods that helped influence many of the priorities for our capital spending. Through the fall we worked on our revenue numbers, examining other opportunities to save money and find new sources of funds. Most of all, through the last 8 weeks of the budget process, each member of our Council worked tirelessly to minimize impact on our taxpayers. Although we didn't always agree we challenged each other and the administration to do better. We succeeded by passing a balanced budget and 5 year plan today.

The balanced \$507.8 million spending plan was made possible because of the courage and great efforts of Council and the Mayor. Along with the Mayor, City Council has created a budget that responsibly addresses the pension promise to our retirees, debt service, infrastructure improvements, proper maintenance spending, and a renewed commitment to public safety and our neighborhoods. Pittsburgh's competitive advantage as a place to live, work, and invest remains strong.

While there are still many difficult challenges we will face in the New Year, such as; implementing the new Department of Permits, Licensing and Inspection, a rental registration program, new economic development projects, and many other initiatives contained in our newly passed plan, I look forward to facing them with my colleagues on this Council.

I would be remiss not to mention how the sharing of information and openness between City Council and this Administration has proven to be fruitful. I am sure that communication not only with the Mayor but with our constituents will continue to improve in the year to come. Initiatives such as open data, a 311 CRM and the financial opengov.com program, all of which I championed, will shed new light for the public on city finances and government operations, "paving" the way for performance based analysis, management and budgeting.

While the future looks promising there is still much that needs to be done, not only in the City, but also in Harrisburg. Issues surrounding non-profit contributions and pension reform will continue to haunt us as we move forward. With a new Governor and legislature taking seat in the capital I will be encouraging this body to work cooperatively with the Mayor on lobbying efforts and establishing the working relationships we need to best benefit the taxpayers of this City."

Starting Out on the Right Foot - Investing in High Quality Early Education

High-quality child care significantly improves children's early literacy, language, math, and social-emotional skills. In Pittsburgh, parents have a wide variety of child care choices, from small home-based businesses to non-profit and private centers across the City. Some facilities are rated for quality by the state of Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS program, a voluntary program that rates facilities from 1-star to 4-stars. In other cases, centers may be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Unfortunately, this lack of standardization in child care center oversight leads to a large variation in the quality of care from one center to the next. This can include extreme differences in a given center's administrative structure, day-to-day programming, and even the condition of facility itself. Because of this variability, we don't have a clear idea sense of the amount of high-quality child care available in the City of Pittsburgh, or how the supply of that care compares to the need for the service.

To address these issues, the Council Women's Caucus passed legislation to perform a "Needs Assessment", a study to look at demographic trends, demand for childcare, and methods for improving the quality of care in Pittsburgh. Once we have that information, we also want to make sure that we have a way of paying for specific improvements. To that end, the Council Women's Caucus recently passed legislation to devote \$250,000 to our Bureau of Neighborhood Empowerment for a low-interest loan or grant program for child care providers. We'd like to model this program after a very successful loan program in North Carolina that provides funding to child care providers for:

- purchase or construction of facilities
- renovations to existing buildings
- bridge loans
- equipment purchases
- start-up expenses

These loans have more flexible terms and competitive interest rates than perhaps traditional banks can offer. Investing in high-quality early education yields higher returns than any other public investment; it's what we call a no-brainer.

If we want kids in Pittsburgh to be ready for the Pittsburgh Promise, we need to get them started early, and ensure that they have high quality pre-k. At-risk children who do *not* receive high-quality early education are 25% more likely to drop out of school, 50% more likely to be placed in special education, 60% more likely to never attend college, and 70% more likely to be arrested for violent crime. The time to invest in our kids, and the future of our City, is now. This is an unprecedented collaborative effort to get more kids on the right path from the start!

Momentum Building for Redevelopment Efforts along Broadway

Many exciting first steps are underway to redevelop the Broadway Avenue corridor in Beechview. The Beechview Area Concerned Citizens generated significant turnout and excitement at its December meeting. Interested residents also met for a brainstorming session on potential volunteer events in the neighborhood at Brew on Broadway.

A request for new wayfinding signs has been placed with the City, to direct traffic from Banksville Road, West Liberty Avenue, and Saw Mill Run Road toward the Broadway Corridor. Clearer, more visible signage could help to capture traffic passing Beechview and assist visitors in navigating the often confusing road networks that our city is famous for!

Another exciting initiative called "Light-Up Broadway!" seeks to generate buzz in Beechview through creative pop-events that raise funds for development. One such event seeks to light up underutilized buildings along the Corridor to keep the Boulevard well-lit. Read more in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article, "[Beechview tries to revitalize its retail corridor](#)" from December 8th. The initiative will also work to raise matching funds from the pop-up events with grant funding. These funds will be invested into local vacant commercial structures, to ready them for profitable redevelopment.

If you would like to assist this initiative in any way please contact Dave Brewton at (412) 295-4787 or by e-mail at drbrewton@ymail.com.

Overbrook School Project: Changing Course

Despite the tireless work of Valcott Enterprises, Economic Development South and Council Member Rudiak, the Overbrook School Project has had to change course. Earlier this year, Federal Emergency Management Agency issued new flood maps. The new map changed the location of the Overbrook school from 18 inches below the floodplain to a full five feet below. The cost associated with the changed flood status rose to the point where the project was no longer feasible.

At 18" below floodplain, only flood proof doors are required. At five feet below, it is a whole different story! Sadly, there is no way to push this project forward with the new floodplain map. After multiple redesign efforts and trying to find a way forward, it became clear that this project is no longer financially tenable.

Barb Valaw, CEO of Valcott Enterprises, LLC said, "We tried redesigning, we tried various creative financing options, and we just couldn't make it work because the cost got out of hand. Now it's time to accept the outcome and move onto the next best option."

The Overbrook School Property is currently under contract for a self-storage facility. It may not be what we had hoped for, but all parties are looking forward to some form of economic development on the site.

Citiparks 2015 Community Festival Season: Small Grants Available

Citiparks would like to invite your community organization to participate in the 2015 Community Festival Season, and apply for small grants! The grants for this year will be determined through a cooperative selection process with each of the nine Council Districts and Citiparks. Each District will be allotted \$2,500 in Citiparks' facilitated goods and services. To be eligible for funding, your organization must be a non-profit, tax exempt, community based organization in existence for at least three years. Examples of organizations that meet these criteria are community councils, civic associations, citizen councils, and other neighborhood groups. Lastly, due to budgetary restraints, Citiparks is limited to funding only one Community Festival in each city neighborhood chosen.

Completed applications must be received no later than Monday, March 31, 2015. Please remember that applications are processed on a "first come, first serve" basis. So please don't delay! If you have any questions, please call Dodi Byrne at 412-422-6405. For applications and the addendum document, please contact our office at 412-255-2131.

Dairy District Update

Moo! Economic Development South is pleased to announce that as of early December they have begun work with the architecture firm Desmone & Associates on the design of the lot at the corner of East Meyers and Brownsville Road, which will be transformed into a community space that can host a variety of events.

In addition, Desmone & Associates has also started design development for ten parcels along Brownsville Road, from Thielman Avenue to East Myers Street. This will include plans for facade improvement, interior improvements, and site design improvements.

EDS will work with these engineers on the project through March of 2015.

Meeting Invitation: Hillcrest Senior Living Development Info Session

At 6:30 PM on Tuesday, January 13th, our office will host a community meeting with the Community Builders to discuss the Hillcrest Senior Living development at the former 1.7 acre Giant Eagle site at 2920 Brownsville Road.

Jim Eby from the Community Builders has some updates to share with local residents who may be interested in the progress of their project... and he'll even share how residents and neighborhood organizations can add their support to help ensure that this project moves forward soon.

For those of you unaware, the Hillcrest Senior Living complex would be a 64-unit four-story building featuring apartments for seniors. Amenities could include a dining room, fitness center and library. Both affordable and market rate apartments would be offered for service supported independent living and may include prepared meals, housekeeping, and even transportation to medical appointments.

Please come out to show your support at Stewart Avenue Lutheran Church (2810 Brownsville Road) on Tuesday, January 13th at 6:30pm.

Brashear Students Create Free Libraries

Students of Brashear High School have launched a program to build and place small free library boxes in the school's feeder neighborhoods. These free libraries are simple wooden boxes, some mounted in old unused telephone booths. These libraries operate on the honor system, books are borrowed and either returned or replaced with a new book.

The free libraries will be placed in Beechview, Banksville, Brookline and the West End, according to staff writer Megan Harris in her December 19th article, "Brashear High 'little libraries' program rolls out". [Read more here!](#)

Brookliners Reassemble History from 1951, 1952 Brookline Journal

Never underestimate a motivated history buff. Clint Burton has assembled the complete online archives of the 1951 and 1952 issues of The Brookline Journal, former newsweekly for the neighborhood and member of the Western Pennsylvania Weekly Newspaper Association. These pages contain fascinating snapshots of Brookline history. Check them out here:

<http://www.brooklineconnection.com/history/Journals/1951/1951.html>

<http://www.brooklineconnection.com/history/Journals/1952/1952.html>

The goal is to archive each year of the publication, from 1947 to 1962. This is a very time consuming project! If you would like to offer assistance or have access to archival equipment, please contact Clint Burton at clint@brooklineconnection.com.

Confirmations and Promotions

Congratulations to the all!

Cameron McLay - Confirmed as Chief of Police

Larry Scirotto - Promoted from Lieutenant to Commander

Taylor Sumansky - Supervisor, Animal Care and Control (and Brookline resident!)

Jason Lando - From Lieutenant to New Commander for Zone 6, Special Deployment Division

Scott Schubert - Promoted from Zone 6 Commander to Assistant Chief of Police

Thomas A. Stangrecki - Promoted from Commander to Assistant Chief of Police

Maurita Bryant - Promoted from Assistant Chief of the Operations Branch to Assistant Chief of Investigations

Honoring Our Neighbors

Each Council office has the ability to issue Proclamation of Council to honor special individuals, organizations, community groups or programs. The recipients of these proclamations are truly some of our brightest and best! This month, our office was proud to recognize the efforts of:

-Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh - For excellence in assisting refugees to create a home here in Pittsburgh. [See the full Proclamation here.](#)

-Linda Donahue - For her work as Tree Pittsburgh's Tree Tender of the Year 2014. [See the full proclamation.](#)

-St. Norbert Parish - For 100 years of Ministry and Community Engagement. [See the full proclamation here.](#)

Carrick High School Parent and Community Workshops

CHS is proud to offer more Parent and Community Workshops this school year. All workshops are offered from 5:30-7:30 PM at Carrick High School. Seating is limited, so RSVP to Susan Loskoch by calling (412) 529-7710 or sending an email to amiller3@pghboe.net. Please include the name(s) of attendees, the date and title of the workshop(s) and a phone number. Workshops include:

Monday, February 16, 2015

* Learn Spanish – Habla Espanol? No worries. Learn common phrases in Spanish and show off your language skills to your friends. This is also a great way to help your child as they venture into learning new languages. Limited to 20 seats

*Parent Computer Lab – Resumes, letters, job applications, church programs, flyers, Internet search...come learn these skills and more, using Microsoft Office Word 2013, Microsoft Office Publisher 2013, Microsoft Office Excel 2013.

Monday, March 16, 2015

* Learn Spanish – Habla Espanol? No worries. Learn common phrases in Spanish and show off your language skills to your friends. This is also a great way to help your child as they venture into learning new languages. Limited to 20 seats

* Theater Games – Come for some fun. We will be doing team building activities (think, human knot) and tons of improv. Learn to think on your feet and have a good laugh. Limited to 20 seats

*Parent Computer Lab – Resumes, letters, job applications, church programs, flyers, Internet search...come learn these skills and more, using Microsoft Office Word 2013, Microsoft Office Publisher 2013, Microsoft Office Excel 2013.

Monday, April 20, 2015

* Learn Spanish – Habla Espanol? No worries. Learn common phrases in Spanish and show off your language skills to your friends. This is also a great way to help your child as they venture into learning new languages. Limited to 20 seats

* Jewelry Making –I'll bet you didn't know we make jewelry here! Why not try making something of your own? We'll provide the metals and you provide the vision. Limited to 23 seats

*Parent Computer Lab – Resumes, letters, job applications, church programs, flyers, Internet search...come learn these skills and more, using Microsoft Office Word 2013, Microsoft Office Publisher 2013, Microsoft Office Excel 2013.

Body Cameras: City to Equip Police Officers Next Year

During budget hearings as well as at Police Chief Cameron McLay's confirmation interview with Council on Monday, December 8, the issue of providing our officers with body cameras entered the discussion. \$650,000 has been added to the 2015 budget in order to provide Pittsburgh Police officers with a body cameras. This amount will cover approximately half of the 1000 cameras needed, with hopes for additional funding to become available from the Federal government.

Body cameras are one way to provide clarity to uncertain police encounters. Eye witness accounts change, interpretations vary, but cameras capture actual events. It has been shown that when both police and civilians are being filmed by police cameras, there is a huge difference in behavior as reported in this Atlantic article:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/12/how-one-small-idaho-city-has-used-body-cameras/383482/>

Read the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette story about this development here: <http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2014/12/08/Pittsburgh-will-buy-body-cameras-for-all-police-officers-next-year/stories/201412080173#>

Shout Outs from our Pittsburgh Public Schools

Carrick High School

-We are very proud of all of our students, but special congratulations go to Matthew Johnson, who was the topic of a Post Gazette article highlighting our efforts to diversify our AP courses. <http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2014/11/28/Pittsburgh-programs-pushes-blacks-to-take-advanced-high-school-courses/stories/201411260138>

-Parent and community workshops will resume in February, after a holiday break. See article above for schedule information and how to register.

Concord Elementary

-Congratulations to Concord's Boys swim team for coming in 2nd place and to Concord's Girls swim team for coming in 5th place!

-The next PSCC meeting will take place on Thursday, January 15th at 5:30 PM

-The students and staff at Concord Elementary School would like to wish everyone a happy holiday season!

Carmalt Academy of Science and Technology

-Primary students are going to meet Mrs. Claus from the North Pole via distance learning on December 19th. She likes to tell the kids her secret cookie recipe that Santa just loves! The students from Pittsburgh Sunnyside will also get this special meeting on December 17th.

-Our middle school students have been creating their own narrative stories which will be compiled into an audio library. These books will be read by the middle school authors along with the background music they created in our keyboard lab. We are all excited about this new project. All students from grades k-8 will be able to hear the stories!

Brashear Shout Outs

-Student led collections are underway to support our school community: coat drive, food drive, cereal drive, clothes drive.

-Brashear's Holiday Extravaganza will be held on December 18th. There will be performances from our band, orchestra, and theater classes. There will also be poetry readings, individual performances, coffee, and homemade cookies at our very own Coffeehouse!

-Students in our construction classes are building free libraries for our community!

-Students have worked hard to demonstrate their understanding on our Biology, Algebra, and Literature Keystone Exams.

-Happy Holidays!

Meetings

Monday, 1/5

7 - 9 PM - Carrick Overbrook Block Watch
Concord Elementary, 2350 Brownsville Road

Thursday, 1/8

7 - 9 PM - Beechview Area Concerned Citizens
Beechview United Presbyterian Church, 1621 Broadway Ave

Tuesday, 1/13

- 6:30 - 7:30PM - Hillcrest Senior Living Development Public Meeting. Stewart Avenue Lutheran Church
- 7 - 9 PM - Brookline Block Watch. Judge Jim Motznik's Office, 736 Brookline Blvd

Thursday, 1/15

7 - 8 PM - Mt. Washington Community Forum
Senior Center, 122 Virginia Ave

Monday, 1/18

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Wednesday, 1/21

6 - 7:30 PM - Zone 3 Public Safety Meeting
Zone 3 Police Station, 830 E Warrington Ave

Tuesday, 1/27

7 - 9 PM - Overbrook Community Council
Accamando Center, 2410 Saw Mill Run Boulevard