

# Pittsburgh Black Elected Officials Coalition

## *Pittsburgh Peace and Justice Initiative*

### Report on Community Meetings

Under the direction of the Pittsburgh Black Elected Officials Coalition (PBEOC), the Pittsburgh Peace and Justice Initiative (P & JI) was founded to “increase public safety, improve quality of life” among constituents (in the City of Pittsburgh) and “ensure the delivery of fair and impartial public safety services.” The initiative endeavors to create or facilitate:

1. An ongoing and systematic African American community engagement process;
2. A resident-informed Peace and Justice Policy Agenda, to include:
  - a. An overview of the current state of black Pittsburgh,
  - b. An overview of the initial community engagement process and findings, and
  - c. Specific policy recommendations.
3. The implementation of the Peace and Justice Policy Agenda utilizing all interested stakeholders and available resources; and
4. A stronger partnership between City, County and State Governments and Pittsburgh’s African-American communities to improve public safety and overall quality of life in those communities.

To this end, the Pittsburgh Peace and Justice Initiative launched as a series of six (6) community meetings and set the foundation for the resident-informed Peace and Justice Policy Agenda. This interim report documents the methods and findings from these community meetings which covered six (6) key civic areas identified by the PBEOC as critical to the future of the African American’s in the region and represent the voices of more than 400 residents who participated in this process. It provides an overview of the initial community engagement process and findings and specific community and policy recommendations synthesized from resident input.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE INITIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The P & JI community engagement process was designed to gather and represent views from a cross-section of Pittsburgh’s African-American communities. An anticipated outcome of the process, according PBEOC documentation, is that “more members of Pittsburgh’s African-American community would be empowered to share responsibility for their environment and neighborhoods; build local networks and participate in civic life with a greater understanding of the role of local government.”

A total of 448 residents participated in the five (5) community meetings (North Side, Sheraden, Hill District, South Side, Homewood) and a sixth meeting at Carlow University, which recruited women for a Roundtable.

<b>Meeting Location</b>	<b>Number of Attendees</b> (Signed-in / Survey counts)
North Side	94
Sheraden	65
Hill District	59
South Side	35
Homewood	143
Carlow Univ.	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>448</b>

At each meeting the structure was the same. Attendees signed in by choosing to participate in one of six topics (e.g., Public Safety, Affordable Housing, Family Outcomes, Business and Organizations, Education, and Employment). All attendees heard or received: (1) an overview of the meeting’s purpose led by one or more member of the PBEOC, (2) ground rules for the discussion, (3) statistics of the state of Blacks in Pittsburgh, and (4) a survey covering the topics to be discussed that evening. Topical discussions were held in “breakout groups” facilitated by trained staff who followed a consistent set of scripted questions. Staff were assigned to each group to serve as notetaker, and selected a volunteer resident from the group to document the discussion

on large Post-It style papers. After the group discussions, a few residents from each group volunteered to share their discussion highlights with the other groups.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

### **PUBLIC SAFETY STATISTICS AT-A-GLANCE**

- In Pittsburgh, Blacks have a higher arrest rate for drug offenses despite comparable drug-use rates to Whites
- 100% of juvenile murder victims in Pittsburgh AND Allegheny County were Black
- Black males between the ages of 20 and 24 have booking rates ten times higher than White males

### **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES**

P & J I: Public Safety Survey Items - Average Rating: 4.9 / 10

- 58% reported “Low” or “Very Low” quality of the relationship between police and community members; 28% gave a “Moderate” or “High” rating; Only 3% rated “Very High”
- 67% reported “Moderate” to “Very High” quality of service from emergency service providers in the community; 21% gave a “Low” or “Very Low” rating
- 68% reported “Moderate” to “Very High” as their feelings for “how safe they feel in the community”; 29% gave a “Low” or “Very Low” rating
- 59% reported a “Low” or “Very Low” rating for the level of diversity among public safety officials in the community; 23% gave a “Moderate” or “High” rating; Only 4% rated “Very High”

### **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS’ VISION FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Participants in the meetings described a vision for communities where safety and security were the daily normal; and neighborhoods where they can choose to live in safety from crime and violence. They talked about positive relationships between the police and community and the mutual respect that those relationships would represent. They dreamed about a community where police misbehavior, brutality, or misdeeds, would be rare and in those rare cases, there would be transparency in how police misbehavior would be handled. Residents want police to be present at community events and even better, they want police to live in the community and to be recruited and hired

from the community. This vision would require members of the African American community to support each other against criminal activity; and only then would there be no “such thing as black on black crime,” gun violence, or other crimes. In this vision, parents and guardians would provide safe and nurturing homes and youth would be engaged in activities that would keep them out of trouble and off the streets.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY-GENERATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for public safety fell into the following categories:

### **Police Force**

- Improve community/police communication and engagement
  - Increase community understanding of police force infrastructure
  - Increase transparency in the policy making process
  - Encourage RESPECT by/from Police and by/from community
  - Mutual respect for Youth and Police
  - Increase police rapport with community it serves
  - Eliminate stereotypes on all sides (Neither cops nor black youth are evil or the enemy)
  - Increase positive police representation/perception of community using media and positive influences such as community leaders, popular, positive entertainers, role models
- Accountability & transparency for all involved in public safety, not just citizens
  - When police engage in criminal behavior, someone other than the DA should prosecute
  - Purchase body cam video systems for officers
  - Transparency in high-stake cases involving police (charges, evidence, convictions)
- Increase diversity of police force to be representative of the community it serves
  - Increase accessibility to grants/loans to pay for education for minorities and women to increase their likelihood to pursue careers in public safety
  - Create programs exposing 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students to police careers
  - Establish a community review board that reviews credentials, background, etc. of all potential police officers PRIOR to hire
  - Improve police screening process

- Establish more directions for women and minorities to pursue jobs in public safety
- Hire and assign officers to police in own community
- Change policy so that criminal records do not exclude participation
- Advertise for women and minorities to work as public officials
- Improve police training
  - Police should be trained to use the gun as a very last resort, after all other possibilities have been exhausted
  - Better training of the officers in the community concerning:
    - Communication / understanding of AA culture
    - Crisis management
    - De-escalation
- Police can increase good will by monitoring public events and keeping them safe
  - More presence at bus stop (especially at night) and around school during beginning and end of school day

### **Youth**

- Expand opportunities for quality employment for youth
- Decrease or eliminate presence of violence-promoting media
- Organize more recreational activities with law enforcement to increase rapport

### **Community**

- Community members protect one another, patronize one another
- Improve perception of police in the community / change the narrative
- Educate citizens on their rights during traffic stops
- Create a community directory that lets residents know which businesses are community owned
- Neighborhood crime watch: Equip neighbors to be first responders with the goal of limiting the need for police involvement for low risk events in the community.
- A call to all community members to do more good
- Encourage each other to participate in the policy making process and vote
- Residents need to be accountable to self and to each other

## **HOUSING**

## **HOUSING STATISTICS AT-A-GLANCE**

- In East Liberty, just 5% of homes were purchased by Black homebuyers from 2011-2014
- Only 37% of Blacks own homes in Allegheny County
- Only 33% of Blacks own homes in City of Pittsburgh
- Blacks make up 57% of the sheltered homeless in Allegheny County
- Pittsburgh needs 21,580 permanently affordable housing units
- In Homewood, median value of home is \$49,000; in Squirrel Hill, the median value is \$287,000
- Blacks are the most segregated minority group in both Pittsburgh and in the nation

## **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES**

P & J I: Affordable Housing Survey Items - Average Rating: 3.5 / 10

- 61% reported a “Low” or “Very Low” rating for the accessibility of affordable, quality housing in the community; 25% gave a “Moderate” or “High” rating; Only 2% rated “Very High”

## **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' VISION FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES**

When it comes to housing, residents of represented neighborhoods desire quality, safe, affordable living options for all members of the community. Many residents said they want to realize the dream of homeownership. They expressed a desire to have access to educational opportunities that will provide guidance on how to own a home. In an ideal vision, residents want neighborhoods with more owner occupied homes and people who take pride in the appearance of the homes and streets in the community. They also had a vision for programs that connect employment and community development to help solve some of the housing issues, while providing jobs that support members of the community.

Participants want access to information that will allow them to thrive in their own neighborhoods. Residents were very aware of patterns in housing that are contributing to gentrification in their neighborhoods and they want to see community members able to stay in their homes, despite changes in their community. Additionally, residents want to guarantee that elderly members of the community are taken care of through the provision of housing options that meet the needs of senior citizens. Residents understood that programs exist that provide funds to support homeownership, tax credits, and funds to help people keep their homes, but felt the information should be more accessible.

Residents agreed that they want to have voice in what happens in the neighborhoods. Many talked about the importance of organizing as community members. One recurring theme from the community conversations was that residents want a voice at the table when developers are coming to the neighborhood. Residents also desire to see developers and contractors that reflect the diversity in their communities. In their vision, they would be able to preserve some of the housing structures and ensure that new housing developments are quality structures that match the character of the neighborhood. Members of the community also desire that vacant lots be repurposed and are available for purchase by members of the community at affordable rates.

An ideal vision for housing requires accountability for developers, landlords, policy makers and residents, in order that all parties can work together to ensure that residents' housing needs are met. Developers should be developing for the community's sake and not the developers interest. It is important to members of the community that funding is not given to non-profit organizations that are ineffective in actually meeting the housing needs of members of the community. It is also important that policy makers are accountable for limiting the development of high end housing in neighborhoods that are traditionally low-income. Landlords should be held accountable for the humane treatment of residents. In order for the vision to be realized, residents believe it is important that policy-makers are on the ground connecting with residents and getting a clear picture of the problems.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY-GENERATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for housing fell into four categories:

### **1. Accessibility**

- Home ownership programs
- Education on home ownership and taxes
- Rent to own programs
- Housing for senior citizens (non-high rise units; splitting larger homes into smaller units for seniors)
- Incentivized opportunities for residents to buy vacant lots

### **2. Affordability**

- 70% of new homes should be affordable
- Preserve property tax rates
- Provide grants for home improvement
- Provide tax credits for homeowners to upgrade and maintain homes

### **3. Accountability**

- City transparency with policies about homeowners, renters, and developers

- Property manager and tenant accountability for properties in bad shape
- Housing organization for tenants with regular meetings
- Central place to call in for information related to housing concerns
- Transparency about where tax money is going
- Landlord accountability for related to safety issues
- Accountability for vacant lot upkeep
- Developer accountability for building quality housing

**4. Adaptability**

- Don't tear down homes in good shape –instead incentivize people to rehab
- Repurpose vacant lots

**FAMILY OUTCOMES**

**FAMILY OUTCOMES STATISTICS AT-A-GLANCE**

- Pittsburgh is ranked 79 out of 100 worst for opportunities for Black children
- Blacks are exposed to more environmental pollutants such as lead
- Blacks have higher rates of asthma, obesity and heart disease
- Blacks are nearly two times more likely to be uninsured
- In Pittsburgh in 2013, Blacks had 44% less median income than Whites
- 22% of Blacks made \$10,000 or less in Pittsburgh in 2013 compared with only 9% for Whites
- More Blacks rely on public transportation in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

**SUMMARY of PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES**

P & J I: Family Outcomes Survey Items - Average Rating: 4.9 / 10

- 48% reported a “Moderate” to “Very High” rating for the accessibility of quality health care in the community; 39% gave a “Low” or “Very Low” rating
- 47% reported “Moderate” to “Very High” access to supportive social services in the community; 38% gave a “Low” or “Very Low” rating

**COMMUNITY VISION OF FAMILY OUTCOMES**

Residents painted a portrait of a vibrant and beautiful physical environment in which to live, work, play, and raise families. The idea of a clean landscape came up time and again across each neighborhood. Residents want to see community gardens and clean sidewalks with trash cans. In their vision, there is affordable mixed-income housing, accessible transportation, and schools/early education centers. In this vision, there are services for both young and older people; there are health care centers and pharmacies as well as recreation centers and mentoring. There are job opportunities within the community for its residents and rich cultural events that celebrate the people who live in the communities. Residents enjoy job training workshops and can secure jobs within the neighborhood that provide sustainable incomes. Vacant properties, litter, and massive potholes are a thing of the past. In this vision, residents have the resources they need, stable housing and jobs, access to mental health services, and reliable transportation (buses, bikes, etc.). Further, the church and other spiritual centers help with outreach efforts to provide hope and support. Violence, crime, and drug abuse is infrequent--there is a true village mentality and people/communities/organizations partner to create a sustainable neighborhood.

## **COMMUNITY-GENERATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations were centered on the physical environment, resources, and policing. Residents also noted that they wanted elected officials to be more present in their communities and to be more accessible.

### **Physical environment:**

- Provide more trash cans and trash collection to the communities
- Allocate funding for community gardens and flower planting as well as environmental upkeep
- Reduce number of vacant lots/buildings
- Fix massive potholes

### **Resources:**

- Work to make buses more accessible as well as other forms of transportation including bike sharing
- Build bus shelters and benches for residents
- Encourage the building of affordable grocery stores, pharmacies, and health care centers
- Encourage the building of affordable mixed-income housing
- Help build a business district and encourage hiring within the community
- Create job opportunities and job skills training that will allow residents to attain gainful employment and stable incomes
- Build recreation centers that serve as safe spaces for youth and families

**Policing:**

- Hire more police of color
- Host forums to increase knowledge of law and legal proceedings
- Have police walk the streets to get to know the communities
- Hire police in the zones in which they live

**BUSINESS & ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT****BUSINESS STATISTICS AT-A-GLANCE**

- Nationwide, 79% of new women-owned firms since 2007 were started by a woman of color
- In 2002, Pittsburgh had the 6<sup>th</sup> smallest number of black-owned firms among the top 40 metro regions in the country

**SUMMARY of PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES**

P & J I: Business and Organizational Development Survey Items - Average Rating: **4.7 / 10**

- 55% reported “Low” or “Very Low” community support of minority and women-owned businesses; 24% gave a “Moderate” or “High” rating; Only 3% rated “Very High”
- 55% reported “Moderate” to “Very High” community participation in faith-based and community-based organizations; 55% gave a “Low” or “Very Low” rating

**COMMUNITY VISION FOR BUSINESSES & ORGANIZATIONS**

Residents painted a vision for thriving community-based businesses, coffee shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and services owned by African Americans from the community that provide daily services and products to the community, region, and nation/world-wide. Residents talked about a need for businesses that allow their dollars to “turn around more than once in the black community” referring to how capital and money stay within and “turn around” in affluent neighborhoods before leaving. For example, community members spending their money at local restaurants instead of

having to order in from outside the community due to lack of options and frequenting local grocery stores instead of having to go to an outside grocery. They spoke of their community being part of the regional and national marketplace with designated businesses zones, business incubators, and a thriving business community with capital and support for current and future entrepreneurs. These businesses would employ and be owned by residents in the community. They would provide or partner with others to provide on the job training and soft skills training to allow young people and those with little work histories to enter the workforce.

Participants in the community meetings described ownership and jobs in companies that are part of the regrowth of the region including manufacturing, construction, and contracting; access to funding and support to plan, start and successfully run locally owned businesses in our communities; technologically equipped, coworking spaces and business incubators centrally located, accessible, and welcoming to African American colleagues; hiring policies and programs that allow youth to receive on the job training and soft skill development in the safety and support of our communities; and systems to span a range of support from foundational development of financial and business literacy savvy needed to navigate government contract processes.

## **COMMUNITY-GENERATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for supporting minority businesses:

- Provide support to help minority businesses walk through the process for getting contracts
- Provide help with writing business plans
- Create a mentoring system that increases capacity of current and future business owners
- Offer incentives for businesses to stay in the community.
- Pool smaller businesses into structure that could accommodate larger contracts
- Start local business incubators and coworking spaces in the community.
- Reduce barriers to existing supports for entrepreneurs and business owners (e.g., high membership fees for business organizations)
- Earmark government grants for businesses in low income communities
- Provide financial literacy education to community to better understand businesses practices

- Look into what works in low income communities in other cities and replicate best practices
- Convene business owners and potential entrepreneurs to better understand their needs and develop a plan based on those needs
- Designate business zones in each low income community
- Turn existing property into low cost space for community businesses
- Establish a suite of consulting supports for current and future business owners in our communities
- Politicians can host events to support businesses (faith-based and secular) in conjunction with churches
- Hold forums specific to business ownership and entrepreneurship to connect business owners to resources
- Enable strong mentoring relationships
- Directories
- Provide scholarships/ grants to organizations for admission to groups
- Politicians host
  - Business expos introducing local business
  - Cross-neighborhood events to share info about resources
- Training:
  - Union sponsored apprenticeships
  - Low income communities getting first priority for youth employment
  - Training opportunities for jobs to teach resident required skillsets
  - Invest in our youth's education to build employment skills, soft skills
  - Equip young people better for the jobs we are not currently able to fill
- Community efforts:
  - Create a community chest of local community money to enable the community to do more family activities and get involved and self invest.
  - Financial literacy education
  - Pool faith-based organizations to raise funds for economic and community development (e.g., to develop businesses and homes for community)
  - Internships for all ages

Recommendations to support churches and orgs:

- Politicians should provide funding to faith based organizations that are meeting community needs
- Churches should allow use of facilities for functions that are outside of church

Recommendations to encourage more entrepreneurship among more black women:

- More money should be allocated to efforts that support female entrepreneurs on the local and state levels
- Quality business development trainings across various neighborhoods
- Resources and money for female-owned businesses
- Investment packages allowing small businesses to compete
- Provide them with access to necessities/options when it comes to education and job hunting/startups
- Allow women to apply first to job opportunities
- More programs like Urban Innovations/ grant programs
- School-based programs that explore business and entrepreneurship, expand the mindset of young women
- Corporate internships for black women
- Provide international experience opportunities to encourage diverse and new thinking

## **EDUCATION**

### **EDUCATION STATISTICS AT-A-GLANCE**

- Within the Pittsburgh Public Schools, Black students are less likely to be proficient in Literature or Algebra by 11<sup>th</sup> Grade
- Blacks hold fewest Bachelor's degrees in the City and County

### **SUMMARY of PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES**

P & J I: Education Survey Items- Average Rating: 4.2 / 10

- 35% reported “Low” or “Very Low” accessibility to quality preschool and daycare options; 39% rated “Moderate” or “High”; 7% rated “Very High”
- 55% reported “Low” or “Very Low” accessibility to quality youth programs available in the community; 26% rated “Moderate” or “High”; Only 4% rated “Very High”
- 58% reported a “Low” or “Very Low” rating for the quality of public schools in the community; 27% rated “Moderate” or “High”; Only 4% rated “Very High”

## **COMMUNITY VISION FOR EDUCATION**

Residents describe a vision of education that consists of community schools with a “child first agenda” where teachers are trained to be culturally competent. Children attend high-quality preschools in the community in which they live. Schools have adequate books, materials, and a rigorous 21st century curriculum. There are plenty of guidance counselors and support staff. Teachers, many of whom are from the community in which they are teaching, are accountable for knowing whether students are learning, and students are, in fact, learning! There are physical education, STEM, arts, and music programs as well as an emphasis on learning about postsecondary options including college and vocational school. Attendance rates are high; suspension rates are low; and students graduate ready and able to take on the next challenge, be it college, vocational school, or a career. There is an emphasis on parental engagement. In their vision, “schools...accommodate parents instead of parents accommodating schools”. Parents feel empowered, as if their voices matter. It is truly a village mentality where schools, parents, and communities work together. The school is a holistic hub for education, nutrition, recreation, mentoring, and social services. When parents or students have a need or concern, there is a resource directory to which they can turn. There is exceptional communication between schools, parents, and children in terms of opportunities for programs and trade, magnets, and CTEs. There is total transparency in how funds are allocated and parents trust that their schools are led by committed folk who care and use funds wisely.

## **COMMUNITY GENERATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for education fell into 3 major categories:

### **Curriculum:**

- Provide an individualized curriculum that takes into account student learning styles
- Provide arts, PE, music, and STEM
- Provide students opportunities to learn about postsecondary options
- Provide students opportunities to gain life skills and critical thinking skills

### **School:**

- Hold teachers, staff, and administration accountable
- Teach diversity and cultural competence to those in school building

- Hire more Black teachers, especially Black male teachers
- Ensure smaller class sizes
- Emphasize parental engagement and provide an inviting environment, paying special attention to parents who have been incarcerated (e.g., hire parental engagement specialist)

**Resources:**

- Provide enough books and materials for all students to take home
- Bring on more volunteers/mentors at school especially those that reflect the community
- Create more affordable before-and-afterschool and preschool programs in the area
- Build better transportation
- Communicate resources that are available (e.g., hire service coordinator, create local resource directory)

**EMPLOYMENT**

**EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS AT-A-GLANCE**

- 16% of Blacks in Pittsburgh are unemployed compared to only 6% of Whites
- In Pittsburgh in 2011, the average Black man with a full-time job earned 41% less than his White counterpart

**SUMMARY of PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES**

P & J I: Employment Opportunities Survey Items - Average Rating: 3.3 / 10

- 71% reported “Low” or “Very Low” accessibility to job opportunities that provide enough money to support a family; 20% gave a “Moderate” or “High” rating
- 66% reported “Low” or “Very Low” accessibility to job training opportunities; 22% rated “Moderate” or “High”; Only 1% rated “Very High”

**SUMMARY of PARTICIPANTS’ VISION FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES**

The vision for employment in the Black neighborhoods in Pittsburgh includes creating opportunities for employment across multiple industries and providing more job

prospects for the poor. Residents expressed the vision for employment opportunities for both adults and youth in the community. They asked for more guidance and support in locating already existing jobs. Yet, residents also highlighted the importance of Black-owned businesses in creating jobs in the neighborhood. The vision for employment includes entrepreneurship as a key avenue to improving opportunities in Black communities.

Participants in the community meetings were very aware of the barriers to employment and painted a vision of Pittsburgh where those barriers are fully removed. For example, they expressed a desire for second chance policies so that those with criminal records might be able to find employment. Another aspect of the vision included better transportation options so that obstacles related to getting to jobs would be eliminated.

Residents expressed a need for more information about available employment opportunities and the need for better advertisement when jobs are hiring. Programs for employment exist, but better advocacy is needed so that more individuals can take advantage of programs. An ideal vision for improving employment in Black neighborhoods includes intentionally sharing information about jobs and programs available to help increase access to jobs.

Opportunities are needed that will adequately prepare people in the community to take advantage of job opportunities. Participants had a vision for various mentoring, networking, and job training programs that would assist young people, ex-convicts, and single mothers be equipped for employment and have access to jobs. The training programs would potentially also teach financial literacy and skills related to supporting a family. In addition to creating programs for members of the community who may struggle to find employment, programs are also needed to provide business owners with incentives for hiring minorities and ex-offenders.

## **SUMMARY of COMMUNITY-GENERATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for housing fell into four categories:

### **1. New Job Creation**

- Create an environment that encourages entrepreneurship in Black communities (e.g. incubators)
- Start manufacturing in Black communities
- Move businesses to the community
- Create partnerships with skilled trained organizations and large organization (e.g. UPMC) for community-based jobs

### **2. Remove Barriers**

- Provide more transportation options in Black communities
- Remove arbitrary barriers to employment (e.g. driver's license requirement)
- Create avenues for ex-offenders to find employment
- Provide childcare options for single mothers seeking employment

### **3. Increase Access**

- Implement intentional strategies to employ minorities and create incentives for employers to diversify workplaces
- Create job training/workforce development programs for inexperienced workers and youth that will help them get jobs and provide support for keeping jobs
- Provide mentoring and career guidance programs to children and youth

### **4. Information Sharing**

- Inform the community about potential opportunities in industries with a shortage
- Expand networks in the Black community for individuals and organizations to share information about employable skills and employment opportunities
- Create a mechanism to provide communication about jobs (e.g. social media, church, email)
- Create a means for people to access knowledge of existing resources for employment and related programs