THE OVERLOOK

January 2026 *The official newsletter of the Fineview Citizens Council and Perry Hilltop Citizens Council* *No. 22*



WELCOME, READERS!

Happy new year from all of us members and staff of the Fineview and Perry Hilltop Citizens Councils.

If you got this newsletter in your mailbox, that means that you are either a current or recent member of our organization. But this being a new year, now is the time to renew your membership to continue receiving our newsletter by mail. (If you are a lifetime member: thank you, and you're all set.)

You may fill out the membership form on the third page of this newsletter to sign up or renew, or you can complete the form on our website, ourfuturehilltop.org.

Thank you for your involvement in the past. Our neighbor-members are our lifeblood; our organizations would be nothing without you. So please do renew, or sign up, today.

Please join us for our first Community Gathering — and Development Activities Meeting — of 2026

We will resume our monthly community gatherings on Tuesday, January 27, at 6 p.m. at 439 Catoma St. in Fineview. The main event will be a presentation from Costello Properties about their proposed development on Buena Vista Street in Perry Hilltop.

The developers and their architect will provide an overview of the layout and design of the new housing, with particular attention paid to how they plan to adapt to the topography. A representative of the city's Planning Department will be present to help answer questions regarding zoning and permitting, and to take notes on our questions and comments.

Besides this presentation, we will hear updates from our elected officials and Zone 1 police officers, and have a chance to ask questions and make requests. As always, dinner will be provided.

A Zoom option will be provided (visit bit.ly/fccphccmeeting to RSVP), but we always strongly suggest that you attend in person.

Boards adopt addendum to 2020 housing plan

Earlier this month, the boards of the Fineview and Perry Hilltop Citizens Council adopted an addendum to our neighborhoods' 2020 Five-Year Affordable Housing Plan, extending that original document's core goals while adapting some of its recommendations for the five years ahead.

In March of last year, our Housing Working Group concluded that while the original five-year period may have ended, the plan remained essentially relevant and useful. Instead of drafting up an entirely new plan for the remainder of the 2020s, we decided to build on what we already had.

The original recommendations in 2020 were for our organizations to expand our real estate capacity with dedicated staff, to create a pilot Community Land Trust project, to preserve and expand affordable residential and commercial units through a Community Land Trust and/or other approaches, to advance the Allegheny Dwellings redevelopment through Choice Neighborhoods specifically, to create an acquisition and development fund to enable us to stabilize our neighborhoods' housing, and to continue our support for existing renters, homeowners, and landlords.

We have made progress on all of those strategies, but there remains much to be done.

Continued on page 2.

Committee Briefs

We're making a tradition of it: in January, in lieu of our usual “Briefs,” we present you with "Lengthys," reports on our volunteer activities over the past year.

Litter Brigade: From the first hints of spring until the last gasps of mild weather, we picked up a loooot of trash. We litter-picked Carrie, Maple, Suffolk, and Bark. We redded up Warren, Fountain, Henderson, and Letsche. We prepped the Overlook for the 4th. (Then we cleaned up the ballfield on the 5th.) We cleared the steps before the Step Challenge. With help from students at Clemson and Waynesburg Universities, we tidied up Fowler Park. It wasn't always big project clean-ups; sometimes, we made an impact by grabbing the litter along our own blocks.

Step Challenge Committee: Another year, another Step Challenge, this one being the 30th. We planned, we organized, we conquered! FCC President Dré Johnson designed special graphics for our swag. FCC Treasurer Chris Caldwell inventoried our steps for minor repairs and big fixes. FCC board member (and Litter Brigade captain) Matt Indoniva led our litter-clearing efforts. New this year was our Step Challenge Coordinator, Jo Deming (a familiar face, though, as former Executive Director of our organizations). Also new this year was our King and Queen of the Hill mini-challenge, based on steppers' times ascending Rising Main. In the end, we had 148 steppers join us for the big event. We will begin meeting in the spring to prep for Number 31.

Housing Working Group: For us, it so often begins with discussion. We talked through many housing-related issues impacting our neighborhoods...

Continued on page 3.

Opening up a new year at Our Future Hilltop

Rhonda Strozier, Executive Director, Fineview and Perry Hilltop Citizens Councils

Our staff have a busy January and February ahead of them!

This newsletter will probably arrive a day or two too late to invite you to our first homeownership education program of the year: "**Unlocking the Keys to Your Dream Home: Credit Building Tips**," scheduled for Thursday, January 22 at 6 p.m., at our office at 2438 Wilson Ave in Perry Hilltop. We have organized this event in collaboration with NeighborWorks and TC Notary, LLC.

Our next Youth Opportunity Bridges workshop, **"Career Ready: Resume Edition,"** is scheduled for January 28th from 6 to 8 p.m., also at our office. Kudos to our programs director, Passion, for taking the lead in putting together these programs.

Meanwhile, our outreach team, the dynamic duo of Casohn and Callie, have scheduled visits to Allegheny Dwellings on the third Wednesday of every month, during the monthly 412 Food Rescue distribution, with giveaways and information to share about programs and upcoming events in the neighborhoods. (Again, the January visit will likely have happened a day or two before you get this newsletter.)

Casohn and Callie also made a visit to the Northside Commons Ministry on January 16, distributing coats and informing our neighbors, and volunteering at the weekly food pantry.

We are working on reviving our **Welcome Bags** program for new neighbors. If you'd like to help deliver welcome bags — or, especially, if you happen to meet any new neighbors — please get in touch by emailing info@ourfuturehilltop.org.

Addendum, continued...

Along those lines, our addendum, adopted earlier this month, names the following additional recommendations:

- Complete a Housing Inventory to inform our decisions. (This is already done, thanks to HWG member David Denne!)
- Based on that inventory, plan for, fund, and complete in-house renovations and preservations of "naturally-occurring" affordable housing.
- Note updated Area Median Incomes when these are provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development every year, and reaffirm our commitment to deep affordability (<50% AMI) as articulated in the 2020 plan.
- Support a market study to attract a new grocery store to the area, to be completed in concert with Rising Tides Partners.
- Think carefully, act strategically, and adapt readily to implement the Choice plan, regardless of any questions around HUD, Community Development Block Grant, or Choice Neighborhoods raised by the actions of the Trump administration.
- Play an active role in seeing City of Bridges Community Land Trust's Lanark Street development to the finish line.
- Continue work on our commercial corridors. With the anticipated completion of the Maple Avenue Bridge and Swindell Bridge renovations in 2028 (give or take a year...), continue working on a parallel track to reinvigorate the Charles Street and Perrysville Avenue area. Complete our renovation of 2115 Perrysville Ave. and consider 2131 or 2107 Perrysville Ave. (both of which are URA-owned) as next steps at Wilson Avenue and Perrysville Avenue.
- Spend every cent of our Senior Home Repair funds (a program launched in 2025).
- Push for our fair share (or more than our fair share) of city-funded demolitions of severely blighted homes.
- Continue in-house home-buyer and home-owner education efforts.

Please consider joining our Housing Working Group to help steer this work, so we can check these off our to-do list by 2030!

CONTRIBUTE TO THIS NEWSLETTER!

It takes some two thousand words and a few good photos to fill this monthly newsletter. Help us make it happen by submitting events for the community calendar, guest articles, photos, and suggestions to info@ourfuturehilltop.org.

City eyes Airbnb regs

Pittsburgh City Council is considering legislation that would impose new zoning and licensing requirements on short-term rentals like Airbnbs.

One bill would create a new business license for short-term rentals. This would apply to both existing units and new rentals going forward. Among the licensing requirements would be a person responsible for the unit who lives within 25 miles of the unit.

The other bill would impose new zoning restrictions on short-term rentals. For homes that remain owner-occupied, little would change, but for new short-term rentals operated by investors, approval from the city's Zoning Board would be required in nearly all of Fineview and Perry Hilltop. Unlike the licensing bill, the zoning bill would not apply to pre-existing short-term rentals. These would be "grandfathered in."

Originally introduced last summer by Councilwoman Deb Gross, the bills were reintroduced earlier this month with additional co-sponsors, Councilmen Bobby Wilson and Anthony Coghill.

Our Housing Working Group has been discussing the issue of short-term rentals in our neighborhoods, especially in Fineview, for some time now. If you have questions or thoughts about these bills, please join us for our next meeting on February 2.

THE OVERLOOK

IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY **OUR FUTURE HILLTOP**, A PARTNERSHIP OF THE FINEVIEW CITIZENS COUNCIL AND THE PERRY HILLTOP CITIZENS COUNCIL.

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Committee Briefs, continued...

last year, from policy proposals (Mayor Gainey's zoning reforms, Councilwoman Gross's short-term rental bills) to major changes coming to the neighborhood (the closure of Triangle Tech, potential developments on Buena Vista Street) to quality-of-life concerns (vacant homes, nuisances, contractor issues). We supported the Land Bank's efforts to transfer, clean up, and eventually sell seven city-owned vacant properties. We also worked with local government partners to motivate the closure of the nuisance bar House of Savvy last summer. We crafted an addendum to our 2020 Five-Year Affordable Housing Plan (see story on page 1). HWG member David Denne compiled a detailed inventory of our housing. (Notably, he built this inventory in such a way that we can re-run the inventory when we need to update our data.) In October, we met with Scott Thomas-Tunstalle and David Serbin, who hope to renovate 1917 Perrysville Ave. (the "Button Factory") and build new housing between Perrysville Avenue and Buena Vista Street. Earlier this month, we met with the architect of a proposed development of 18 new homes between Buena Vista Street and O'Hern Street. We have also been discussing recent layoffs at our real estate partners, Rising Tides, and doing our best to plan ahead as they get themselves onto a solid financial footing.

Gardening Club: 12 volunteers opened up the Fineview Community Garden in May, and 9 volunteers took part in Unity Corner's mulching day in June. By mid-summer, decent weather and consistent watering and weeding had our plants huge and healthy. With funding from the city through the Love Your Block program, we replaced deteriorating raised beds on Carrie Street with four new, long-lasting cedar beds. We are all so proud of the plants we raised, veggies we enjoyed, birds, bees, and other pollinators we fed, and the beautiful spaces we've made for our neighbors (human and deer alike, ha ha...) to gather. Weather-permitting, Fineview and Unity Corner will reopen in April.

Youth and Seniors Committee: In February, our long-time chair Gia bid adieu to the committee. (Thanks again, Gia, for your years of work with our neighborhoods' young people.) We held an egg-decorating contest in the spring, at which Karen Tucker Nibbs from the Upper Rooms reigned supreme. We held two Senior Serenades with jazz guitarist Ken Lamison, at the Upper Rooms and Perrysville Plaza. Our staff helped put on last year's Halloween party at Perrysville Plaza. And we wrapped up the year with our 6th annual gingerbread house decorating contest. (See Photo of the Month.) We are still looking for a new chair! Could it be you?

Interested in getting involved?
Email us:
info@ourfuturehilltop.org

This Month in Hilltop History: Urban Survival Center established

Jon Hanrahan, Fineview Citizens Council

The crunchy bookstore at 2129 Perrysville Ave. didn't last long. Opened in 1973, the Spirit of Truth Book & Craft Store was intended as a hub for Pittsburgh-area Watchers, who believed that the second coming of Christ would occur in their lifetimes. While they were waiting for the son of God, they hoped to establish a chain of bookstores and health food restaurants where they could teach classes in guitar, ESP, yoga, and dream interpretation. The store's proprietor, Nancy Pidutti, told the *North Hills News Record* that she was practically a minor prophet, "so sensitive I can feel that major events are getting ready to occur."

Major events did follow — a president resigned! the Steelers won their first Super Bowl! — but surely Nancy did not foresee that her bookstore would close within its first three years.

Around then, in January 1976 — 50 years ago this month — the Perry Hilltop Citizens Council initiated a new youth program: the Urban Survival Center. By the end of the year, the Urban Survival Center succeeded Spirit of Truth as the storefront tenant at 2129 Perrysville Ave.

As one staffer later described its purpose to the *Press*, the Urban Survival Center was "an educational and recreational resource...

Continued on page 4.

JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TO RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER BY MAIL!

As a member of the Fineview Citizens Council or Perry Hilltop Citizens Council, we will mail you this newsletter every month. We will keep you up to date on our organizations' activities, goings-on in our neighborhoods, and opportunities for you to get involved. You will also be eligible to cast your ballot in our annual board elections. If you attend at least one community meeting this year, you may run for election to our boards.

To join or renew, fill out this form and mail it along with the appropriate payment (check only, please) to our office at 2438 Wilson Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15214. **You can also join or renew on our website, ourfuturehilltop.org.** Memberships run from January through December. Your contributions to the organizations are tax-deductible.

Name(s):

Address:

Neighborhood / Zip:

Phone:

Email:

___ New Resident (first year) $0

___ Financial hardship $0

___ Individual $5

___ Organization $10

___ Household $10

___ Business (non-voting) $20

___ Non-resident (non-voting) $10

___ Lifetime individual/household $40

Urban Survival Center, continued...

for kids, 10 to 19, who may be having trouble inside or out of school." As the *Post-Gazette* later put it, "The Urban Survival Center copes with drop-outs and delinquents, helping them to get their high school equivalency through testing and then find jobs."

One scene observed in 1977 by the *Press* is illustrative. "Seven boys and a girl, frequenters of the Urban Survival Center, have a job ahead of them. Yard work. They've been doing a lot of clean up lately — trimming hedges, taking away garbage, clearing vacant lots — in their Perry Hilltop neighborhood."

At this point, one year in, the program had between 6 and 15 regular participants, most of them 10 to 14 years old. The program found them useful work, and paid them in recreation and field trips around the city. "The fact that they are unpaid shows a concern on their part to do something for the neighborhood," said *Press*.

"During the school year, the center offers outreach programs at Perry and Allegheny High Schools, as well as individual tutoring and counseling at the center for kids having trouble in school and for dropouts working toward a GED," reported the *Press*.

Another scene, from 1980, the last recorded in local papers: "The children in the Urban Survival Center are lying on the floor in the main room. When not teasing or kidding each other, they are drawing and coloring intently. A television set blares, virtually ignored by all present."

The children were crafting at 2129 Perrysville Ave., though the Urban Survival Center had recently expanded into nearby St. Luke's Memorial Church. That summer there would be a river cruise and a trip to Three Rivers Stadium. A dreamed-of trip to SeaWorld in Ohio would require a car wash to raise the funds. "After four years, the center has become an integral part of its neighborhood."

UPCOMING EVENTS

COMMUNITY GATHERING
JANUARY 27, 6–8 P.M.
439 CATOMA ST.

CAREER READY: RESUME EDITION
JANUARY 28, 6–8 P.M.
2438 WILSON AVE.

HOUSING WORKING GROUP
FEBRUARY 2, 6–8 P.M.
ONLINE (CONTACT US FOR INFO)

COMMUNITY GATHERING
FEBRUARY 24, 6:30–8 P.M.
2601 NORWOOD AVE.

COMMUNITY GATHERING
MARCH 24, 6–8 P.M.
1600 SANDSTONE CT.

COMMUNITY GATHERING
APRIL 28, 6–8 P.M.
2610 MAPLE AVE.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Verneatha Scott's Christmas display at the Upper Rooms, first-prize winner of our 6th Annual Gingerbread House Contest. We had nine participants this year between Steelworkers Tower and the Upper Rooms.

Have a photo you'd like to share? Email us: info@ourfuturehilltop.org

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