Allentown Neighborhood Next Target of Revitalization Efforts

By DEANNA GARCIA

The Hilltop Alliance has announced a six-year, $1.5 million dollar economic development and community services grant aimed at bringing the struggling neighborhood back to life. Allentown, nestled between Mt. Washington and the South Side Slopes, has a high vacancy rate, nearly double that of the city's median rate and property values about half the city's median value.

“This is a corporate tax credit program administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development called the Neighborhood Partnership Program, and in this case, our sponsors are PNC Bank, Dollar Bank and UPMC Health Plan,” said Aaron Sukenik, executive director of the Hilltop Alliance.

The Neighborhood Partnership Program includes business district revitalization, which will target the East Warrington Avenue Business District that runs through the neighborhood.

“This includes a full-time business district manager to coordinate under-utilized, vacant property owners with new businesses who might be looking to locate. We also have grant funds available for that in the form of a rent abatement grant,” said Sukenik.

Other efforts will focus on crime prevention, façade enhancements and greening strategies. The revitalization plan also includes access to help for residential improvements.

“This is really a very proactive approach to working with property owners to connect them with public assistance or other resources to help make upgrades that are needed,” said Sukenik.

Neighborhoods around Allentown such as Mt. Washington and South Side Slopes have already experienced some revitalization, but Allentown has fallen under the radar until now.

“I think really this is just Allentown’s time,” he said, “it’s time for the pendulum to swing the other way for disinvestment to become reinvestment and apathy to become community action.”

The program also includes a fresh food initiative to expand access to produce in the neighborhood, children’s education programs and workforce development. Partners include the Allentown Community Development Corporation, The Brashear Association, the Hilltop YMCA Computer Center and the Mount Washington CDC.

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