If 2019 can be summarized in a phrase, it would be “scaling up”. Not scaling up for the sake of growth, but scaling up for maximum impact.

The number of Hilltop households receiving home repair assistance tripled in 2019! Our outreach efforts now include social services referrals, along with home repairs, free wills, tangled title and deed assistance and more. In 2019, we forged development partnerships for the 50+ vacant properties in Allentown that we have worked to acquire for many years. Beginning in 2020, we will see multi-million dollar investments to comprehensively renovate or build new affordable homes.

The Hilltop Urban Farm, at the former St. Clair Village property, is now an independent nonprofit organization, operating two programs with two full-time staff members. While independent, the Hilltop Urban Farm staff is co-located with the Hilltop Alliance staff and continues to coordinate with the farm on projects and services that benefit all Hilltop Residents. In 2020, the Hilltop Alliance will work closely with more Hilltop community groups on creating housing and redevelopment strategies, in order to begin acquiring vacant properties in other Hilltop neighborhoods where we are being asked to help.

Through this report, we acknowledge and thank our supporters and partners who also see the tremendous progress being made from investing in our residents and the places we love on the Hilltop. I hope you will continue supporting the Hilltop Alliance and its member organizations, who are working hard to keep our neighborhoods unique in their own right, while being unified as one Hilltop with a shared future.

Sincerely,

Linda Piso
2019 President, Board of Directors
By the Numbers

2,551 Residents who received 40 lbs. of free fresh produce at Fresh Fridays

13 Special events in the Allentown Business District in 2019

35 New Allentown businesses since the beginning of the Neighborhood Partnership

115 Homeowners receiving Tangled Title Assistance & Prevention in 2019

313 Resolved property maintenance issues in 2019

93 Homeowners receiving renovation assistance

600 Youth who attended the 2019 Hilltop Urban Farm programming season

14 Youth workers employed during the Summer 2019

3 Agriculture entrepreneurs working in the Farmer Development Program

11 Residential properties being renovated for resale in Allentown

29 New construction, single-family homes in Allentown in pre-development

2 Previously vacant houses renovated and sold
2019 brought the sixth year for the Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) in Allentown. It was a year of new growth, as the neighborhood welcomed new businesses including Dr. Tumblety’s Apothecary, Goodbye Lulu Nail Salon, and La Marie Brow Club. Since 2014, our business district program has helped bring in 35 new businesses, providing 61 grants and loans to support new and existing businesses. The result has been a vacancy rate that has shifted from 40% to 15% today. New in 2019, we worked closely with the Allentown CDC to now have a regular street cleaner on East Warrington Avenue!

2019 featured more special events in Allentown than any prior year. The 3rd annual “Taste of Allentown” showcased the neighborhood’s unique businesses, partnering eateries with retail shops. Local business, The Weeping Glass, hosted a spring and fall “Allentown Night Market” highlighting Allentown’s alternative art scene. The first ever “Hilltop with the Lidoff” was organized by two local businesses, RE360 and Commonwealth Press, which attracted hundreds of visitors. All of these events highlight the involvement of local business owners while providing an event for the community and attracting new visitors to the Allentown business district.

After so much change in the business district over the past five years, 2019 was a year to update our plans, in order to guide the next five years of our work. Over the spring and summer, consultants worked with the Hilltop Alliance to develop a five-year work plan for the business district to achieve goals such as attracting more second floor office tenants, increase daytime foot traffic, and improving the district’s marketing and branding. Hilltop Alliance also completed a four-month neighborhood parking study. The parking availability map shows usage, specific to the time of day, and can be used by business owners as a reference for their customers.

Back in September 2018, the Hilltop Alliance acquired the properties that contain Paisano’s Pizza, Leon’s Caribbean, and the Allentown Lunchtime Lot. With the longtime property owner looking toward retirement, these were acquired to keep the highly sought-after commercial kitchen spaces affordable for these long-time businesses. After many engineers’ reports, architecture, contractor quotes and funding applications in 2019, major renovations will happen in 2020, transforming and preserving these buildings for another 100 years.

As part of the Allentown NPP, we have spent six years acquiring vacant, tax delinquent residential properties. With these properties finally becoming available to us, the work to redevelop these vacant lots and houses was a major undertaking in 2019.

Focusing on the “Grandview South” micro-neighborhood of Allentown that was recommended in our 2013 Housing Strategy, over 50 properties have been, or are in the process of being, acquired through the City’s Property Reserve process. Two of the properties acquired to-date have been resolved and sold (without subsidies) after being vacant for many years. In 2020, we anticipate all 11 of the vacant homes that we have sold to, and acquired with, the Pittsburgh Housing Development Corporation, to be comprehensively renovated and re-sold for affordable homeownership.

Submitted in November 2019, 31 vacant lots in this area of Allentown are all part of an affordable housing tax credit application, with an experienced development partner. If we are awarded tax credits in 2020, 29 new single family homes will be built on these lots. They will be rented to households that meet certain income-qualifying criteria and for a period of 15 years, we will work with the renter to prepare them for homeownership. They will then have the option to purchase these homes after the 15 year tax credit period. At a total project cost of around $10M, this would be the largest single-project investment in Allentown in almost 40 years.
During 2019, the Hilltop Urban Farm embraced immense growth in many ways. As 2018 saw the transformation of the farm from an idea to a fully fledged farming space, 2019 saw the activation of every major program area. The early months of the year began with the hiring of a Youth Farm Manager (now Director of Farm Programs) and the search for an Executive Director. This ultimately led to the hiring of John Bixler, who, with more than 20 years of non-profit management experience, worked with the Hilltop Alliance to finalize all legal agreements immediately following the Farm’s 501c(3) in June 2019. As the year progressed, the Hilltop Urban Farm added 4 new board members (to the founding 7 members), expanding the skill sets to include, farmer business development and urban education programming.

With the help of 14 youth employees, the Youth Farm hosted over 600 Hilltop area students in summer camps to learn about nutrition, cooking, growing food, and local food systems. The Farm also worked with 50 teachers to bring agriculture education into classrooms.

Many site improvements were implemented including: installation of seasonal irrigation, 4 shipping containers for storage, a fully operational solar array (including solar powered wifi), as well as the creation of gravel walkways, and mulching pathways. Over 700 volunteers donated more than 2,300 hours on Farm improvements.

To learn more visit: www.hilltopurbanfarm.org

Staff:

John Bixler,
Executive Director
Hilltop Urban Farm

Ned Brockmeyer,
Director of Farm Programs
Hilltop Urban Farm

Partners

Adagio Health
Allegheny County Conservation District
AEO Foundation
BeeBoy Honey
Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers of Pittsburgh
Chatham University
Consumer Fresh Produce
Deco Resources
Duquesne University
The Education Partnership
East End Food Co-Op
The Fruit Tree Planting Foundation
Go Supreme
Grow Pittsburgh
Housing Authority - City of Pittsburgh
involveMINT
Landforce
JustServe
Learn & Earn
Lighthouse Cathedral
Manchester Bidwell Corporation
Pennsylvania–American Water Company
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture
Penn State Center Pittsburgh
Penn State Extension
Plant Five For Life
Power Up
Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
PittMoss
Pittsburgh Public Schools
PittServes
Repair the World
Sol Patch Garden
Sustainable Pittsburgh
Student Conservation Association

Funders

Allegheny Foundation
EQT Foundation
Grable Foundation
Key Bank
Three Rivers Community Foundation

Partners

Adagio Health
Allegheny County Conservation District
AEO Foundation
BeeBoy Honey
Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers of Pittsburgh
Chatham University
Consumer Fresh Produce
Deco Resources
Duquesne University
The Education Partnership
East End Food Co-Op
The Fruit Tree Planting Foundation
Go Supreme
Grow Pittsburgh
Housing Authority - City of Pittsburgh
involveMINT
Landforce
JustServe
Learn & Earn
Lighthouse Cathedral
Manchester Bidwell Corporation
Pennsylvania–American Water Company
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture
Penn State Center Pittsburgh
Penn State Extension
Plant Five For Life
Power Up
Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
PittMoss
Pittsburgh Public Schools
PittServes
Repair the World
Sol Patch Garden
Sustainable Pittsburgh
Student Conservation Association
While the Property Stabilization Program (PSP) originated as a code enforcement and property maintenance intermediary, in the past three years it has become primarily about providing direct resources to homeowners for home preservation and building community wealth. By working in coordination with City departments, local magistrates, third party assistance agencies, local contractors, and neighbors, the PSP resolves property-related issues through resources, data and partnerships.

By the end of 2019, around 604 residential properties had received property stabilization assistance from our office. This includes home repair assistance to 93 households across the Hilltop neighborhoods. We have also been able to offer our Free Wills Program and Tangled Title assistance to 83 families.

In 2019, we became the south Pittsburgh program administrator for the City of Pittsburgh Housing Opportunity Fund’s Homeowner Assistance Program, which provides financial assistance and contractors for renovating and improving residential owner-occupied properties. To-date, 16 projects are underway and we anticipate scaling that program in 2020.

Hilltop Alliance also expanded our community outreach by updating our streamlined intake form to include social services offerings. In the pilot year of this, we connected 38 residents with services, a partnership with the Brashear Association.

In 2020, the Hilltop Alliance will be working closer with the Mt. Oliver and St.Clair neighborhoods to complete a housing strategy, provide home repair assistance and begin the process of acquiring vacant, abandoned properties for future renovation and sale. This similar resources-before-redevelopment approach has been successful in our work with the Allentown community, so we anticipate being able to scale this approach while tailoring it to neighborhood-specific needs and priorities.