

**PUSH Buffalo** and  
**Buffalo**  
**Neighborhood**  
**Stabilization**  
**Company Inc**

# Building for the Future

Presenting a

**Community Development**  
**Plan** for the **Massachusetts**  
**Avenue Corridor Green**  
**Development Zone**

**1** Assets, Opportunities, Neighborhood Vision

**3** Origins

**5** Community Planning

**7** Successes

**9** Executing the Plan

## NEIGHBORHOOD VISION

Through an ongoing planning process, PUSH members have created a plan for improving the infrastructure and quality of life in their neighborhood. This document attests to the creativity, vitality and spirit of Buffalo's Massachusetts Avenue Corridor Green Development Zone and the vision that its residents have for its future.

The best plans and the ones with the highest likelihood of success build on the assets currently available and address the daily needs of those currently living in the West Side. This document proposes strategies that meet these local needs, reinforce the positive work that has been going on for several years and work toward a comprehensive and sustainable neighborhood with opportunities for all who live here.

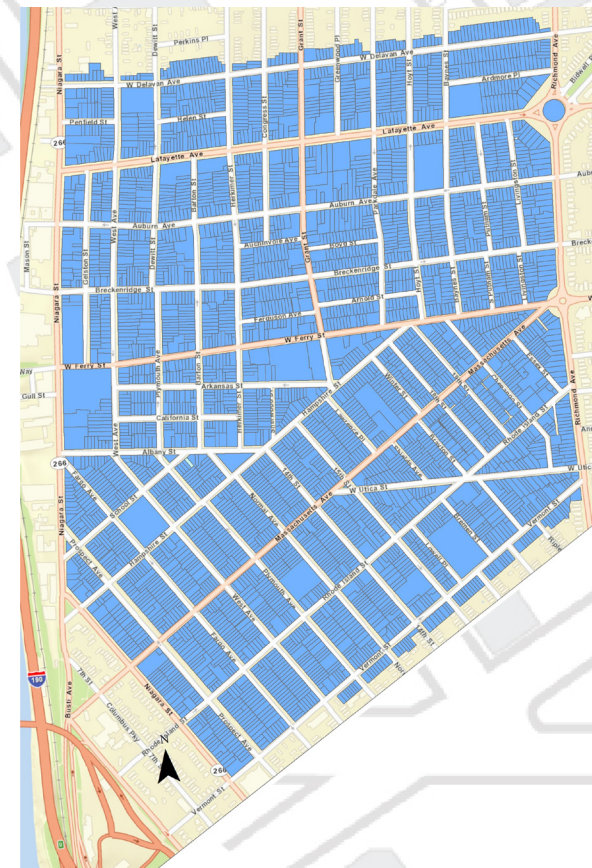
Building on the successful organizing and housing work begun by PUSH in its Green Development Zone, this plan proposes:

- Significant new investment in high quality, affordable housing through rehabilitation of vacant, abandoned buildings as well as new construction on long vacant lots on an increased scale from previous efforts;
- New commercial development, support for small business and improvements to business districts within PUSH's Green Development Zone
- Advocating for strategic investment in public infrastructure;
- Continued acquisition of vacant and abandoned property through the BNSC Land Bank;
- Continued redevelopment of vacant lots for urban agriculture, open space and green infrastructure to address combined sewer overflows;
- Use of innovative green building techniques, weatherization of occupied units and developing new energy systems; and
- Creating a community jobs pipeline.

A neighborhood is more than just housing or infrastructure. Without jobs, safe streets, vibrant commercial corridors with opportunities for new and expanding businesses, and inviting green spaces, residents cannot fully realize their vision for a sustainable neighborhood.

PUSH and its members have started this work, bringing over \$6 million in investment and creating many jobs in recent years. With continued investment and support, it can continue to grow and provide a model for sustainable neighborhood development across the country.

Ultimately, PUSH believes that people know what they need where they live and strives to put that idea into practice at every opportunity.



Map of PUSH's Green Development Zone

## EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS, ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

PUSH's work is focused on the heart of Buffalo's low income and ethnically and racially diverse West Side. About 40 percent of residents in the district live below the poverty line and more than 60 percent of children in this area live in poverty.

Many major racial and ethnic groups are represented in the larger neighborhood. Among the largest groups represented are Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Native Americans, Italian Americans, Burmese, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Somali, and Cambodians.

The neighborhood has high levels of housing vacancy, abandonment and demolition, while still preserving some level of density.

The large majority of residents in the target area are tenants that currently reside in substandard housing. One component of substandard housing is poor insulation which leads to low-income tenants spending a disproportionate amount of their income on heating bills.

Two of the most active and used bus lines in the NFTA system run through the neighborhood. It is also home to important Buffalo institutions and businesses such as Jericho Road, the Massachusetts Avenue Project farm, the newly-rehabbed Massachusetts Avenue Park, Rich Products, D'Youville College, Buffalo State College, La Nova Pizza, Guercio's Market, and others.

“

**Why do I like my job? I get to work in my neighborhood and build it up. I poured that concrete and I know it's not going anywhere.**

*- Mitch Neasman, PUSH member and worker on PUSH's Massachusetts Avenue Development Project*



PUSH members at Massachusetts Avenue Park



Vacant house on 14th Street



## PEOPLE UNITED FOR SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

PUSH Buffalo was established to:

- Create strong neighborhoods with quality affordable housing;
- Decrease the rate of housing abandonment by reclaiming empty houses from neglectful public and private owners and redeveloping them for occupancy by low-income residents; and
- Develop neighborhood leaders capable of gaining community control over the development process and planning for the future of the neighborhood.

### PUSH's Green Development Zone (GDZ):

After undertaking several green construction projects along the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor, PUSH and its members decided to designate the district as a Green Development Zone.

PUSH created the award-winning Zone as an emerging internationally-recognized laboratory for sustainable housing, community planning and green jobs training. The GDZ combines efforts by PUSH and other groups including BNSC, MAP, Outsource Center, Homefront, and Habitat for Humanity.

The model creates a national model of urban revitalization by concentrating strategic investments in green-design housing rehabilitation, environmental sustainable projects on vacant land, community gardens, and other urban agriculture projects.



## BUFFALO NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION COMPANY INC

PUSH, and its non-profit housing corporation, BNSC, have utilized several programs and models to develop high-quality affordable housing in the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor Green Development Zone.

The early model of housing development relied heavily on volunteers. PUSH also trained and employed local residents to perform much of the work.

PUSH recognized that the number of vacant housing units was too great to rely solely on small-scale rehabilitation projects. PUSH and BNSC have, therefore, begun a process to scale up their work to include larger projects, utilizing a number of public and private funding sources.

PUSH formed BNSC to be a nonprofit housing corporation dedicated to creating affordable housing units on the West Side of Buffalo, specifically the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor.

BNSC's mission is to:

- Increase access to quality, affordable housing by substantially increasing the number of units being renovated and constructed each year
- Enhance neighborhood fabric by coordinating investments in infrastructure and rehabilitate vacant lots. BNSC currently owns 50 lots, which have been developed as clean and green spaces, community gardens and rain garden demonstration projects
- Prevent gentrification and displacement of residents by ensuring affordable of both rental and homeowner housing units
- Increase tenant and landlord education
- Act as a land bank to acquire vacant housing and lots and stabilize them in preparation for development



## COMPETITIVE AWARDS RECEIVED

### MAD Plan

- 11 units funded through NYS Small Projects Initiative, Federal Home Loan Bank and City HOME funds.

### Urban Initiative

- Complete exterior renovation of three units funded by NYS Urban Initiatives Program

### Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative

- Five units to be renovated beginning the Summer of 2012
- Restore NY is a secondary funding source

### Grant Street Commercial Corridor

- Administer funds for commercial improvements and streetscape enhancements along Grant Street

### Neighborhood Stabilization Funds

- Create a land bank to purchase vacant and abandoned property

A total of **\$4 million** in capital



## COMMUNITY PLANNING WORK

Since PUSH began, it has conducted several neighborhood planning processes. Hundreds of residents, supporters and representatives of the many community, faith-based and service-providing organizations have attended a series of planning and visioning sessions to determine the most appropriate housing, commercial and green space development solutions to meet the needs of our neighborhood. In preparing this plan, PUSH and BNSC have consulted this earlier work, as well as conducting surveys and one-on-one conversations with more than 300 neighborhood residents.

Residents have created goals including increasing high-quality affordable rental housing, commercial development that serves their needs, improving streetscape infrastructure, reinvesting in Massachusetts Avenue Park, and creating new community gardens and other open spaces. They have identified weaknesses and capitalized on identified strengths, while seeking to achieve a shared vision for a sustainable neighborhood.

PUSH will continue this planning at all stages of its work to ensure that projects meet the needs of neighborhood residents and increase community control of resources. The plans that come out of this work serve as a living document to guide PUSH's physical development and organizing efforts in our neighborhood. We also hope that these plans act as a catalyst for neighborhood planning efforts throughout the West Side and the City of Buffalo.

## COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

**2011**

Neighborhood planning congresses

**2012**

Over **300 surveys** and **one-on-one conversations** with neighborhood residents

Development of plan with PUSH, BNSC Board and Development sub-committee

**April 18, 2012**

Development Plan kick-off



Massachusetts Park Planning Break Out Session, Fall 2009



The Massachusetts Avenue Park Revitalization Plan created by neighborhood residents and PUSH members.



GDZ Congress Break Out Session, Spring 2011

## COMMUNITY PLANNING WORK

Out of these planning sessions, surveys and conversations came the following goals and strategies:

### GOALS

- Improve quality of life, financial, and health outcomes of neighborhood residents
- Increase access for low-income people to quality, affordable housing that is healthy, energy-efficient and safe
- Increase the number of small businesses and improve neighborhood business districts to better serve residents
- Enhance the neighborhood with investments in public infrastructure
- Strengthen the capacity of neighborhood residents to mobilize and control community resources
- Encourage safety by creating an economic and physically healthy neighborhood that residents can take pride in
- Provide spaces for passive and active recreation, as well as for residents to grow food
- Create quality jobs and pathways to employment for neighborhood residents and youth
- Reduce dependency on carbon energy and lower heating costs of neighborhood residents
- Develop and strengthen community partnerships with public and private sector leaders to work towards community control of resources



### STRATEGIES

- Increasing the production of quality, affordable, green housing units in PUSH's Green Development Zone, including two 35-unit Low Income Housing Tax Credit rental projects as well as other development
- Continued concentration of housing investment in a block-by-block manner beginning from Richmond Avenue and moving westward along Massachusetts Avenue and adjacent streets
- Exploring Development of an innovative health center and retail space at the 5-points area
- Assist local entrepreneurs in creating and expanding businesses that meet community needs, including development of commercial property and streetscape improvements in local commercial corridors
- Improvements to sidewalks and streetscape infrastructure including new bus shelters and street furniture
- Continued use of the BNSC land bank to acquire vacant and abandoned properties to stabilize for future use.
- Continued use of vacant land for sustainable purposes including community gardens, rain gardens, green space, and recreational areas for all ages
- Continued completion of the Massachusetts Avenue Park Community Revitalization Plan, the neighborhood's largest green space, to improve the site's accessibility and amenities
- Create opportunities through neighborhood development projects for training and employment in construction, landscaping and small businesses
- Utilize existing and create new energy efficiency programs to weatherize all homes in the GDZ



## PUSH AND BNSC'S PLANNED AND COMPLETED WORK IN THE GDZ



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECTS - COMPLETED AND UNDER CONSTRUCTION

All of BNSC's work strives to incorporate energy efficiency and innovative green building techniques, including super efficient heating systems and insulation techniques.

### Massachusetts Avenue Development Project

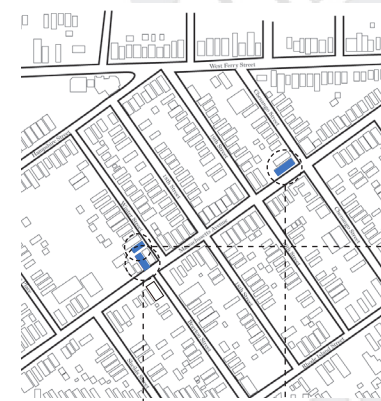
- 11 units of affordable housing in three historic structures funded through New York State's Small Projects Initiatives program by the State of NY Housing Trust Fund, City of Buffalo HOME funds, and other sources
- High standards of green design, including, super-insulated shells, high efficiency furnaces and on-demand water tanks
- Creation of new jobs, including hiring former PUSH trainees to work full-time to work on the Zone's rehabilitation projects

### 456 Massachusetts Avenue exterior renovations

- Funding through a NY State Urban Initiatives grant
- Green features for this 3-unit building included a metal roof and super-insulation of the shell
- New exterior clapboard, lighting, landscaping, fencing, and restoration of the storefront

### Net Zero House

- The NetZero house renovation project at 10 Winter Street stands as a model of cutting-edge, super-efficient building techniques. Net Zero construction is now the norm across Europe but it's virtually unknown in the United States.
- The house produces as much energy as it uses through a combination of a 4.5-KW solar array for electrical generation, a geothermal heating system embedded in the adjacent vacant lot, a solar hot water system, super insulation of the home's "thermal envelope," and a "cool" metal roof with a reflective finish to passively cool the home during the hottest summer months.
- The metal roof is 100 percent recyclable.
- Demonstration projects like these provide opportunities for green job training and experimenting with energy efficient techniques that can be used throughout all neighborhood development. A second demonstration project at 16 Winter Street is in the planning stages.



10 Winter Street



398 Massachusetts Avenue



460 Massachusetts Avenue



## NEXT STEPS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### Massachusetts Sustainable Neighborhood Project

- Five units of affordable housing on three scattered sites, including the first new construction in the neighborhood in several decades
- Pilot project of a new statewide program, the Sustainable Neighborhood Development Program, created by PUSH in partnership with former Governor David Paterson.
- Gut rehabilitations of two long-abandoned properties and an in-fill project on the site of two demolished buildings

### Increasing the scale of affordable housing development, by:

- Developing approximately 70 units in two scattered-site rental projects utilizing Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and other funding.
- Continuing to utilize and advocate for all available public and private housing development programs, including HCR's Housing Trust Fund, Urban Initiatives, and Sustainable Neighborhoods program to develop projects appropriate to Buffalo's neighborhood scale.
- Creating new single-property demonstration projects to showcase innovative green technologies while also providing job training opportunities.
- Working with graduates of PUSH job training programs and other neighborhood residents with significant construction experience to develop a Homesteading Program for abandoned but rehabable properties.
- Utilizing all available public and private sources to continue property acquisition to ensure a constant pipeline of available properties for new projects.
- Exploring a small-scale first-time home buyer program to rehabilitate vacant homes.

### Ensuring that housing developments meet the needs of neighborhood residents, by:

- Developing housing with a variety of different ownership types including rental housing, traditional homeownership, limited-equity cooperatives, and mutual housing associations;
- Exploring creating a Community Land Trust to ensure long-term affordability and stewardship of housing in the GDZ;
- Providing housing for under served populations including seniors and veterans.



Planned new construction at 335-339 Massachusetts Ave



456 Massachusetts Avenue, "Before"



456 Massachusetts Avenue, "After"

## NEXT STEPS FOR COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring that business and service needs of neighborhood residents are met, by:

- Developing a mixed-use commercial property at 527 W. Utica Street, the former “Club Utica”, possibly including new retail space for the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) and an innovative new health center providing services for neighborhood residents
- Exploring commercial development in new projects with a focus on providing space for existing businesses to expand and new businesses to develop
- Leveraging public and private financing, including New Market Tax Credits, to redevelop commercial space
- Continuing to provide assistance to local businesses to improve facades in concentrated business districts via the Main Streets Program
- Support partner organizations to create small business creation, especially in the food sector
- Explore ways to create and support small business incubator spaces
- Employing an import replacement strategy to replace those goods and services currently imported by people and businesses in Buffalo with those produced in the area. Such a strategy will help Buffalo businesses find new market opportunities and create jobs



527 W. Utica, “Club Utica”



New pathway and rain garden on Grant Street - a part of BNSC's Main Streets program



West Side Ministries, utilizing a grant from BNSC's Main Streets Program, revitalizes 286 Grant Street for two new businesses - a used furniture showroom and a bicycle repair/job training center.



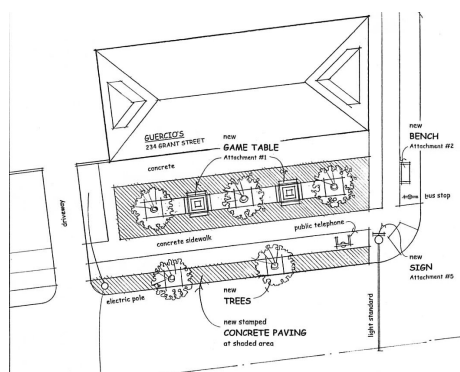
## INVESTING IN PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Public infrastructure significantly strengthens resident's abilities to use and enjoy their neighborhood. It also impacts perceptions of a neighborhood and its economic development.

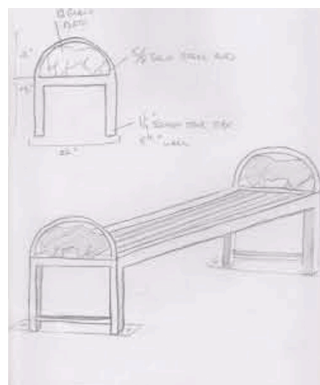
PUSH and BNSC will continue to advocate for streetscape improvements including sidewalk repair, new lighting and other amenities, such as benches, bicycle parking and bus shelters to improve access to public transportation. Where possible, new development projects will include these features.

BNSC's Main Streets Program will include several public infrastructure improvements at Grant and Lafayette, including new benches, game tables, a mural, and a rain garden.

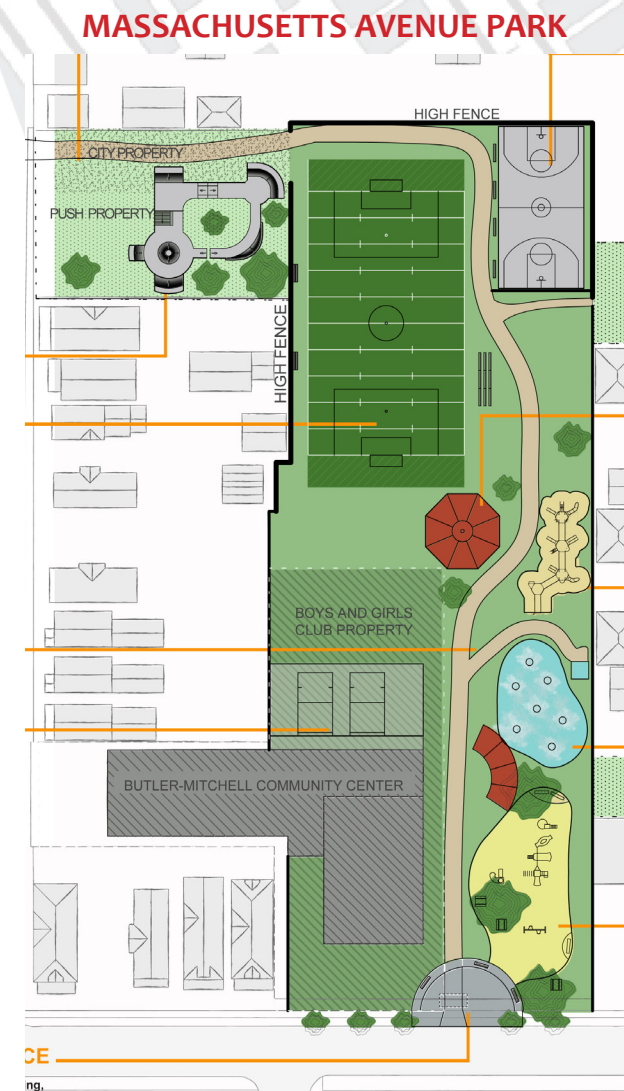
Since 2009, PUSH and neighborhood residents have planned and advocated for redevelopment of Massachusetts Avenue Park. In 2011, the City of Buffalo agreed to the Massachusetts Avenue Park Revitalization Plan, which will implement significant improvements to the park over the next three years. PUSH will continue such advocacy and planning work to ensure that the Plan is carried out, and to create other similar investments.



Plan of streets cape improvements for Grant at Lafayette through BNSC's Main Streets Program



Design of benches for Grant at Lafayette



The Massachusetts Avenue Revitalization Plan created by PUSH, neighborhood residents and the City of Buffalo

## BNSC LAND BANK - AN ANTI-GENTRIFICATION STRATEGY

BNSC established a land bank in the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor in 2009 for the purpose of acquiring and stabilizing vacant and abandoned property. Since that time the land bank has acquired close to 50 properties. Substantial funding has come from the Federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

BNSC has used its land bank properties in a variety of ways. BNSC has partnered with Habitat for Humanity Buffalo and HomeFront to redevelop houses for home ownership. BNSC has also created significant new green space in the neighborhood, including the Hampshire Street Community Garden, the West Ferry Butterfly Garden, and the School 30 Community Garden.

BNSC plans to continue acquiring property in the neighborhood in order to establish a pipeline of properties for future affordable housing and commercial development. We define gentrification as a process by which higher-income households displace lower-income residents of a neighborhood, changing its character and making it less inclusive of a mix of incomes. The land bank provides one mechanism to prevent that by helping us gain community control over properties in the neighborhood while a future rehabilitation or redevelopment plan is produced.

BNSC will utilize various planning and organizing strategies to acquire property, including campaigns against irresponsible neighborhood property owners. Such activities are ultimately aimed at removing property from the speculative real estate market, creating new green spaces and minimizing displacement of low-income residents from the neighborhood.



The BNSC Land Bank acquired and stabilized 60 Lawrence, and then transferred it to Habitat for Humanity Buffalo to be rehabbed for a first-time homeowner



Clean and Green lot at 265 W. Delevan, currently used as an unofficial soccer field



Winter Street garden. BNSC uses this space to grow plants for its other properties.



BNSC hopes to use 405 Massachusetts Ave in an upcoming development project



## GREEN SPACE, URBAN AGRICULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

A neighborhood is more than houses and business. Green spaces provide essential places for gathering, recreating, and growing food - elements critical to a neighborhood's success.

PUSH and BNSC will continue to provide space for community gardens and other spaces to grow vegetables in order to grow more food in the West Side to help our neighborhood become healthier, more sustainable and self sufficient, and have better access to and control over healthy food.

We will also continue our partnership with the Massachusetts Avenue Project to build a regional food system focusing on localizing food system components—including food production, food processing, waste management, food transportation, and sale of food — toward the end of developing infrastructure and an environment that will employ local people.

Started by neighborhood residents on Buffalo's West Side in 1992, the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) was incorporated in 2000. MAP's Growing Green Program was founded in 2003 to address the growing land vacancy, high youth unemployment and food security needs of the community. Since that time Growing Green has created hundreds of green jobs for inner-city youth, developed models for sustainable urban food production and youth leadership, increased healthy food access, and built partnerships to promote regional food system development. For more information, please visit MAP's website at [www.mass-ave.org](http://www.mass-ave.org).

Similarly important is developing and advocating for safe, fun and accessible recreational spaces for all ages including sitting areas, playgrounds, tot lots, and other uses. Some of these will be developed on BNSC land, others will be developed in partnerships, similar to the work implemented in the Massachusetts Avenue Revitalization Plan.

Vacant lots also provide opportunities for demonstration projects for sustainable land stewardship, such as creating rain gardens in partnership with Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper to divert rainwater from antiquated combined sewers.

### PROJECTS FOR 2012

- 309 - 315 14th Street Community Gardens: 1/3 acre site will be transformed into a 28-lot community garden
- 133 Chenango: State-of-the-Art rain garden built in partnership with Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper
- 123 18th Street: Vacant lot conversion to raspberry bushes in partnership with MAP



15-bed community garden at 291 Hampshire Street



Birds, Bees, and Butterflies Garden at 445 West Ferry. The garden provides food for pollinators, which help bring 80 percent of the world's crops to the table.



Garden and social space built in partnership with Public School 30

## CREATING A COMMUNITY JOBS PIPELINE

### Green Jobs - Green New York

Over the last several years, PUSH has worked to develop a vision for an equitable green economy anchored by new public and private investments in the energy efficiency retrofit industry.

PUSH will continue to implement that vision through PUSH Green, an initiative that is part of the Green Jobs – Green New York Program, the first statewide home performance program of its kind in the country to combine a community-based approach to customer demand generation, community and workforce benefit standards, and an On-Bill Recovery financing mechanism designed to increase access to the benefits of energy efficiency improvements for working families and economically distressed communities.

### Community Jobs Pipeline

A community jobs pipeline is a strategy to engage low-income communities of color and disconnected workers in the struggle to create an equitable community-controlled energy efficiency retrofit economy.

The strategy combines conventional workforce development activities – recruitment, referral, job development, job placement – with opportunities for community building and leadership development.

PUSH Green aims to build relationships with contractors who perform high quality work and are committed to partnering to further the community jobs pipeline vision.

To further training goals, PUSH GREEN will also partner with local labor unions and other training groups to build the residential energy efficiency and affordable housing development industry in Western New York.

Additionally, PUSH and BNSC will strive to create careers in landscaping and the building trades through the development work we do.

PUSH staff and trainees install a geothermal heating system for the NetZero House.





## GOING FORWARD - CREATING A COMMUNITY GROWTH MACHINE

---

Given the absence of a coherent national strategy for addressing the economic crisis, community-driven models of sustainable economic development are sorely needed. The model of community development promoted in this plan embodied in the concept of the Green Development Zone—variants of which are taking root not only in Buffalo but also in other post-industrial communities including Buffalo, Kansas City, Springfield, MA, and the South and Northwest Bronx—are showing early promise as a strategy for generating sustainable development and achieving community control of resources in very low income neighborhoods.

By substituting community-based organizations, local contractors, and progressive labor unions for the regional corporate elites that anchor typical urban growth machines, Green Development Zone's can serve to expand employment in a range of green jobs sectors while producing high-quality affordable housing; reducing housing vacancy; insulating homes and upgrading their heating systems; eliminating health hazards such as mold, asbestos and lead; increasing access to healthy food and cleaning-up neighborhood brown fields.

As opposed to the typical growth machine found in most neighborhoods, the "Community Growth Machine" we propose leverages the power of community organizing to win commitments of public and private capital for needed improvements to the physical infrastructure of low-income neighborhoods. By gaining control over public and private capital for "triple bottom line projects" that create economic growth, equity, and environmental sustainability, a Community Growth Machine can help build the foundation for a new community economy.

The plan presented in these pages, born out of a series of democratic planning processes, starts to achieve the successes necessary to make the Community Growth Machine a reality for the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor.

These interventions, include:

- Rehabilitation of vacant lots and housing, including 70 units of high quality affordable rental housing utilizing Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and other funding sources;
- Support for small business creation and redevelopment of key commercial properties, including 527 W. Utica
- Significant investment in public infrastructure;
- Continued growth of the BNSC Land Bank to support property acquisition and future redevelopment;
- New community gardens and green spaces for recreation and environmental remediation;
- Green building technology demonstration and training projects, including exploration of alternative energy sources;
- Weatherization of all occupied housing in the Green Development Zone
- Creation of a community jobs pipeline, including opportunities for training and employment through neighborhood development projects.

271 Grant Street - Buffalo, NY 14213 [ 716.884.0356 ]



**PUSH**

**BNSC**