NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIES

CREATING NEIGHBORHOODS OF OPPORTUNITY IN PITTSBURGH

THROUGH INVESTMENT, HEALING, AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Presley Gillespie
(he/him)
President & CEO

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- Leads Neighborhood Allies' work to create thriving neighborhoods and expand economic mobility across Pittsburgh.
- Oversees strategies that connect community development, entrepreneurship, real estate, workforce opportunities, and community wealth building.
- Brings experience from both the financial sector and the nonprofit/community development field, with a career focused on expanding opportunity in underserved communities.
- Recognized for building cross-sector partnerships that align residents, businesses, philanthropy, and public institutions around neighborhood transformation.
- A passionate advocate for equitable development, resident ownership, and creating pathways for low-income Pittsburghers to achieve economic mobility.

NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIES

A Pittsburgh-based community development intermediary that connects community voice, development expertise, and capital to create neighborhoods of opportunity.

Annual Organization Budget | **$7.6MM**
Net Assets | **$16.9MM**
Leveraged | **$79MM since 2014**
Team Members | **22 Full-Time**
Core Values | **Collaboration, Equity, Flexibility, Innovation, Compassion, Accountability**

Our mission is to engage Pittsburgh-area organizations and residents with innovative tools that expand opportunity and catalyze transformative community change.



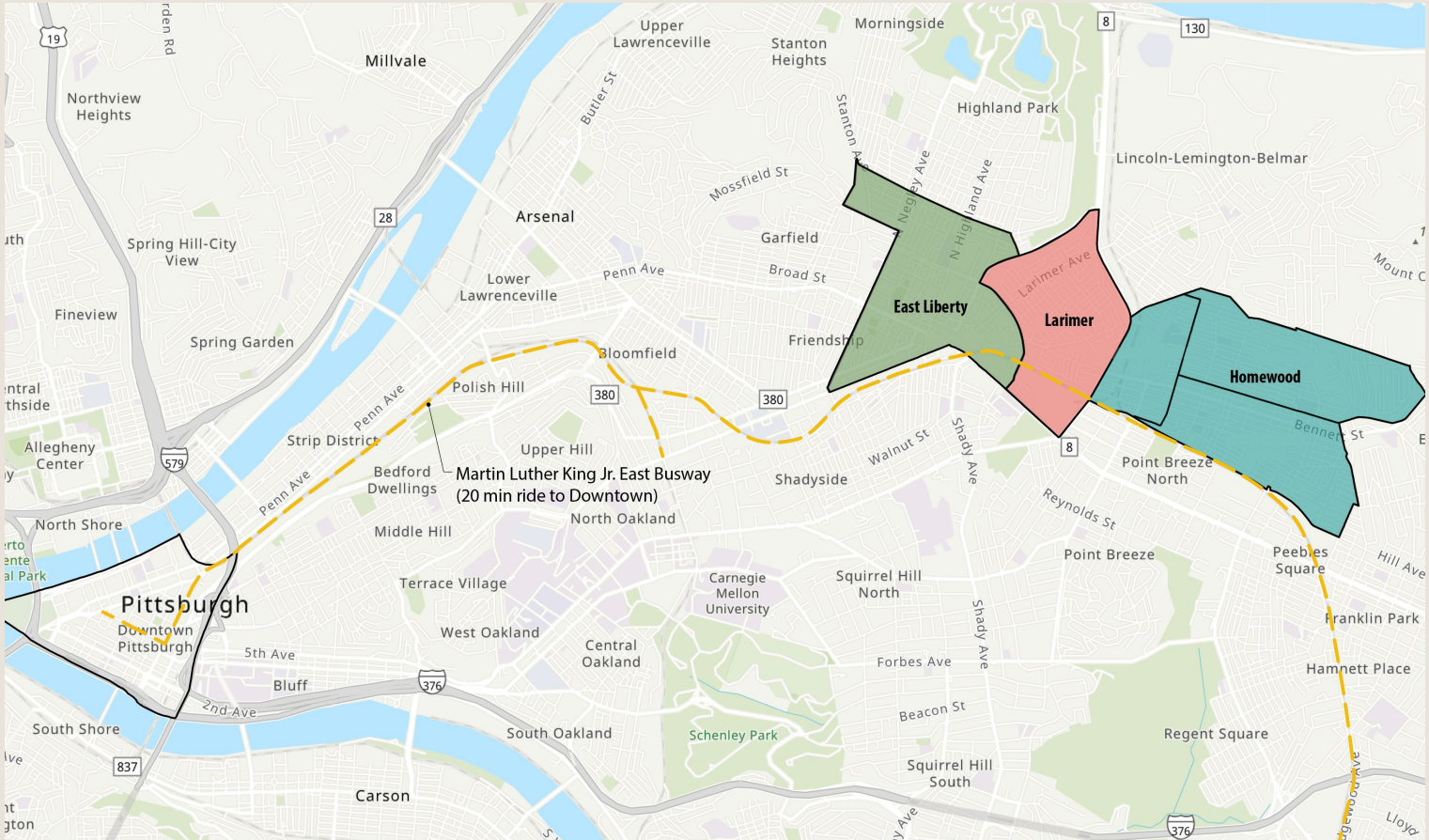
Saunders, Pete. “The Scales of Gentrification.” Planning, American Planning Association, Dec. 2018, https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/dec/scalesofgentrification/

Challenge We Are Working to Solve

- Persistent neighborhood disinvestment
- Concentrated poverty
- Limited pathways to economic mobility
- Historic racial inequities
- Loss of trust in institutions
- Social Fragmentation and Isolation

How do we move from development that disrupts to development that heals?

UNDERSTANDING PLACE: East Liberty, Larimer, & Homewood



How do neighborhoods heal and thrive?

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Resident Voice & Agency
Trust & Healing
Collective Action
Investment & Development
Creation of Opportunity
Economic Mobility & Community Well-being

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Core Strategies

These strategies are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Together, they create a coordinated system designed to ensure that investment leads to shared outcomes, stronger neighborhoods, and upward economic mobility, rather than displacement.

Connect

- Build resident and stakeholder relationships

Catalyze

- Unlock investment and development opportunities

Strengthen

- Support neighborhood organizations and leaders

Heal

- Create conditions for trust, belonging, and resident agency

Scale

- Influence systems, policy, and capital flows

POWERING PEOPLE-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT:

How Our Programs Work Together to Build Community-Led Neighborhoods

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An Integrated Approach to Community Development

SID program

Design + Engagement

- Helps residents and grassroots orgs visualize community-driven ideas
- Provides co-design and storytelling support for equitable outcomes

CREA program

Technical Assistance + Capacity Building

- Guides projects from concept to construction
- Supports Black and brown developers and community orgs navigating real estate processes

Neighborhood Capital Fund

Capital Stack Support

- Offers early-stage funding, loan guarantees, and equity investments
- Closes gaps in financing for community-rooted projects

Together, These Programs:

- **Bridge the gap between vision and implementation**
- **Strengthen local capacity and reduce dependency on outside developers**
- **Align capital with community priorities for long-term impact**

How do we rethink who has the power to shape neighborhood change?

What if we measured success differently?

Economic development should not just ask:

HOW MUCH GROWTH??

It should ask:

Who benefits?

Who stays?

Who feels safe and supported?

Our Approach: A Three-Step Framework

Step 1

Listening

Establish foundational relationships, trust, and shared understanding through trauma-informed engagement and Healing Map development, laying the groundwork for future pilot investments once community priorities are clearly articulated.

Step 2

Anchoring

Strengthen community anchors - legacy homeowners, small businesses, and cultural institutions - identified through Phase 1 as essential to neighborhood identity, social cohesion, and long-term stability.

Step 3

Investing

Build on the knowledge, relationships, and lessons generated through Listening and Anchoring to explore how resident-defined priorities and community well-being can inform future land use, development, and larger-scale investment decisions. Identify opportunities to translate these insights into longer-term strategies and practices that extend beyond the Initiative's initial three-year implementation period.

Listening: What Sustains Community Well-Being?

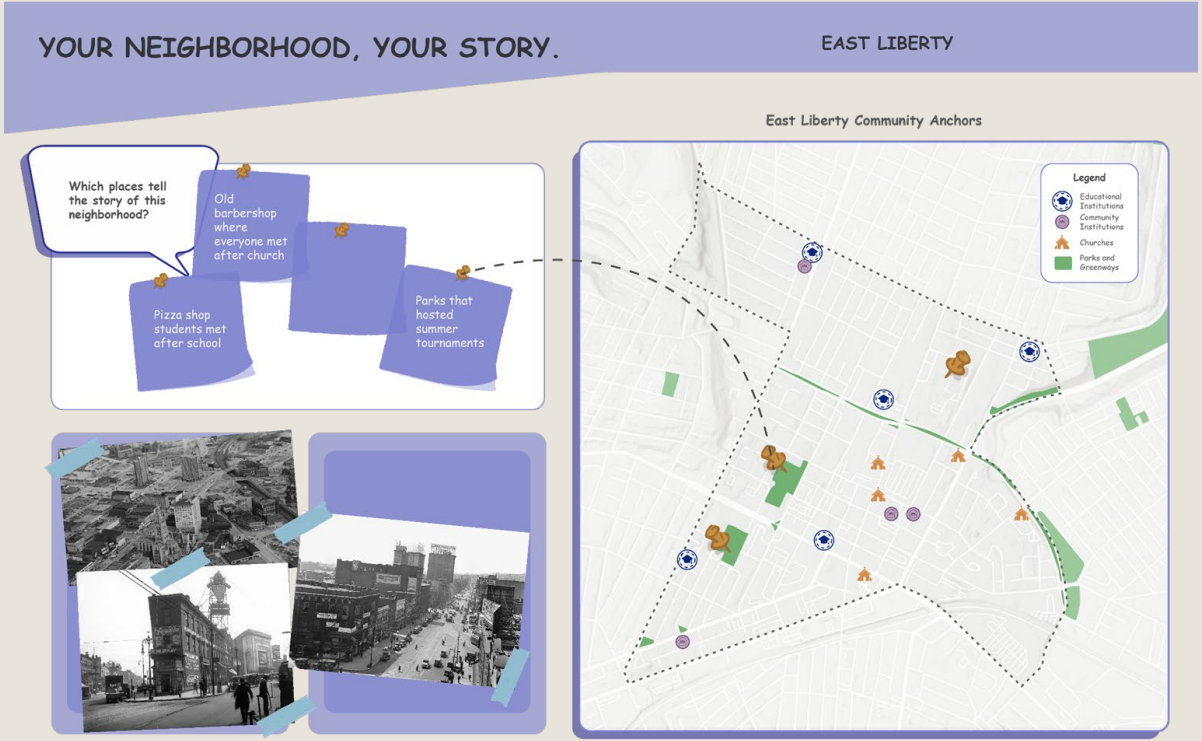
What This Reveals…

Areas with strong community identity but low investment

Places people avoid despite infrastructure presence

Gaps between “planned” and “lived” city

This changes where and how we invest.

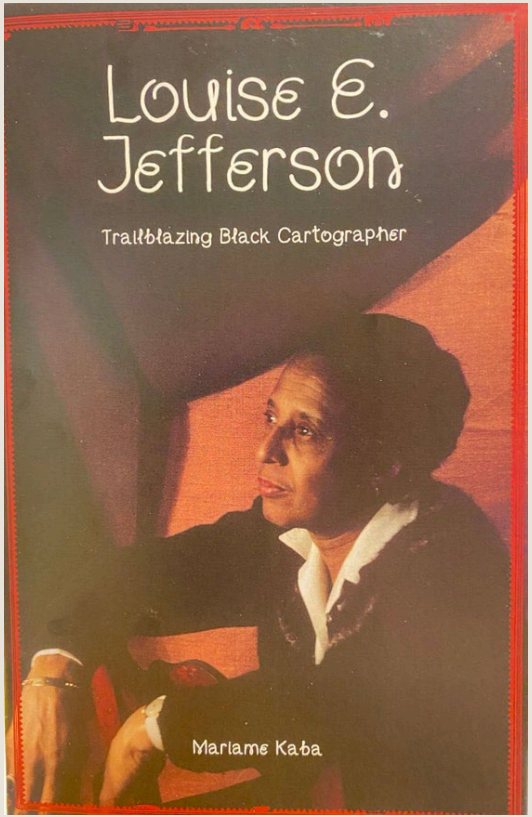


“Counter Cartography”

A map can become more than a directory of sites or an account of harm. It can:

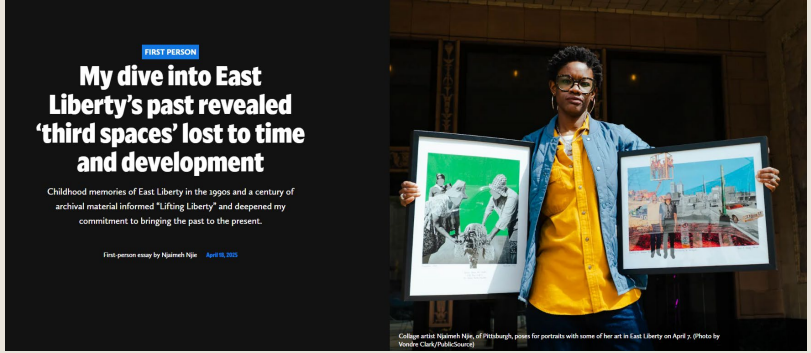
- locate the people, spaces, memories, and cultural infrastructure that have held a neighborhood together;
- acknowledge displacement without allowing displacement to be the whole story;
- make residents’ knowledge legible as expertise; and
- visually connect inherited histories to present conditions and future possibilities.

Louise Jeffersons work in the early 1900s supports our vision for
. **a resident-informed visual record of what has been lost, what remains, what sustains community, and what deserves investment and protection**



Sources and Inspiration

Prisonculture . “Louise E. Jefferson: Trailblazing Black Cartographer.” Prisons, Prose & Protest, Substack, 18 Mar. 2025, https://prisonculture.substack.com/p/louise__-e-jefferson-trailblazing-black



Looking back helps me look forward

When "Lifting Liberty" opened, long-term residents and newer community members gathered together in the Kelly Strayhorn lobby. I heard stories about past spaces and people represented in the exhibit, and I heard stories of how people are experiencing East Liberty today. I thought back on the village that raised me with a deeper understanding that I've experienced only the latest versions of a neighborhood that has historically changed many times over. The history is bittersweet, but sharing space at the opening renewed my belief that we have a say in what lies ahead. As we look back, we move forward.





Fig. 5.—The Gem Theater (photograph circa 1954), a highly popular venue among African Americans in Knoxville before desegregation, would be destroyed in urban renewal and the building of James White Parkway. Used with permission of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center.

This partnership between the Beck Center and the Department of Geography and Sustainability has supported the Center's mission to preserve and map the public memory of Black historical geographies in Knoxville as part of the restorative justice of acknowledging and working through the racialized wounds of urban renewal and highway infrastructure. The partnership has also provided students a unique opportunity to learn, understand, and discuss the legacy of urban renewal policies within the city where they live, study, and work. In the case of students who partnered on the Beck restorative cartography and who grew up in Knoxville, the project has been incredibly eye-opening and provoked a critical reinterpretation of the role of racism in urban development, how and why the city looks the way it does, and the role that mapping can play in challenging the exclusion of specific histories from the contemporary landscape (Brice 2023).

Sources and Inspiration

Left: Brown, Shaylah. "Lifting Liberty Exhibition Documents Black Life in East Liberty." TribLIVE, 3 Mar. 2025, https://triblive.com/aande/museums/lifting -liberty-exhibition-documents-black-life-in-east-liberty/

Right: Alderman, Derek H., et al. "Mapping as Black Memory Work: Toward a Restorative Cartography of Urban Renewal/Removal in Knoxville, Tennessee." Geographical Review, vol. 115, no. 4, 2025, pp. 525–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/00167428.2024.2376147

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BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITY CONNECTION:

The Importance of Community Ownership

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LOVE MY NEIGHBOR!
A RESIDENT-LED GRANT PROGRAM







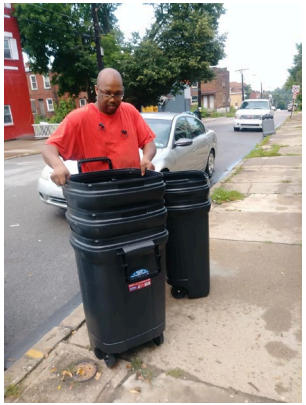
BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITY CONNECTION:

The Importance of Community Ownership

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LOVE MY NEIGHBOR! ETHOS & IMPACT

















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Measuring Change & Well-being

What does success look like?

- Residents feeling greater:
  - Belonging
  - Connectedness
  - Agency
  - Positive outlook for the neighborhood
- Local anchors and other social infrastructure are stabilizing, then thriving
  - Enhanced organizational capacity & capability
  - Deepening community engagement and cross-org partnerships
- Quality of life and neighborhood confidence
  - Tax delinquencies down
  - Nuisance 311 reports down
  - Investment up
- Resident socio-economic improvement

Measuring Change & Well-being

How will we measure our progress?

- Surveys and interviews
- Partner data – engagement participation; organizational initiatives and collaborations
- Public data, such as:
  - 311
  - Parcel ownership, condemned properties
  - Tax delinquency and abatement
  - Census ACS
- NA internal data and methodologies, such as:
  - Technical assistance hours
  - Grants
  - Our proprietary socio-economic model



Measuring Change & Well-being

What are our gaps and where do we have opportunity to learn best practices?

- Surveys
  - Fatigue
  - Alternative approaches
- Partner enablement and motivation
- Timing



Challenges & Questions

1. Translating Community Knowledge into Development Decisions
Have others developed mechanisms for incorporating resident-defined priorities into land use decisions, development agreements, or public investment criteria—particularly when the community does not control the land?

2. The Limits of Community Participation
How have others navigated the tension between asking residents to help shape neighborhood priorities and having limited authority or resources to act on what residents identify?

3. Building a Pathway from Pilot to Policy
What should we be documenting or measuring now so that the lessons from EECF can eventually inform public policy, financing decisions, or development practices beyond our three neighborhoods?