



2021 Community Agenda

1. Remove Police from Frontline Response to Mental Health Crises

Erie County should develop a county-wide mental health emergency response team comprised of mental health professionals to act as on-site first response teams during mental health emergencies. Mental health emergencies should be handled by trained mental health professionals, not insufficiently trained police. A shift in the manner of response will reduce the risk of harm to residents with mental health challenges.

Leading Partners: VOICE Buffalo, WNY Agents of Change, Free the People WNY, Citizen Action of NY

2. Pass the Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA)

Elected leaders in the NYS Legislature and Governor Cuomo should pass the Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA) during the 2021 legislative session. The CCIA seeks to raise \$15 billion per year from corporate polluters while directing revenue toward investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects controlled by and benefiting frontline communities, support for communities and workers transitioning away from fossil fuel industries, investments in large-scale infrastructure projects that create family sustaining green jobs, and rebates to poor and working class households and small businesses to mitigate cost-shifting by polluters.

Leading Partners: PUSH Buffalo, WNY Environmental Alliance, Open Buffalo, Citizen Action of NY, Ujima Theatre Company, Coalition for Economic Justice, Wakanda Alliance

3. Use Public Land for Public Benefit

The City of Buffalo should use the vacant land it owns on behalf of the public to make the city more equitable and sustainable. It can do this by: (1) working with residents, community groups, and nonprofit agencies to establish a comprehensive plan that permanently reserves 50% of city-owned vacant land for equitable, sustainable uses such as: green affordable housing, community gardens, passive green spaces for carbon sequestration, urban farming, green infrastructure, renewable energy, parks and recreation, walking and bicycling paths, and public art; and (2) creating a policy for the free transfer of appropriate lots to nonprofit agencies through a request for proposals (RFP) process.

Leading Partners: Grassroots Gardens WNY, Clean Air Coalition, Black Rock Riverside Alliance, Massachusetts Avenue Project, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust

4. Equitable and Sustained Funding of Frontline Arts Communities

The City of Buffalo should establish a sustained annual fund at the level of 0.25% of the city's budget for frontline arts organizations and artists. The fund should be managed by the Community Services & Recreational Programming Department. Frontline arts organizations and artists are defined as those who are from the communities that are first impacted by climate, economic, and racial injustice. They are also institutions and individuals who have served frontline communities, communities of color, and low-income communities since their founding.

Leading Partners: Ujima Theatre Company, Frontline Arts Buffalo, Our City Builds, Buffalo Arts Studio, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Locust Street Art, El Museo

5. Implement a New Police Oversight Model and Increase Public Involvement in Police Contract Negotiations

The Buffalo Common Council should overhaul police oversight in accordance with the proposal made by the Buffalo Police Accountability Board in their Spring 2020 report. This proposal would create two oversight bodies with stronger powers to hold hearings on police misconduct and police budgets, receive and review complaints, investigate complaints with subpoena power, and require annual reports from the Police Commissioner. Further, police union contracts control many aspects of policing in Buffalo, but residents are left without a voice in the negotiation and contract process. Common Council should solicit robust public review of and input on all police contract provisions before ratification.

Leading Partners: Partnership for the Public Good, Free the People WNY, Citizen Action

6. Improve Language Access and Inclusion in Western New York

Erie County should demonstrate its commitment to inclusion and diversity for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) – those whose primary language is not English – by passing a county-wide comprehensive language access local law mandating the development of department-specific LEP plans, practices, and training. This will ensure all individuals in Erie County have equal access to medical care, government services, civic participation, education and training, jobs, and public safety services.

Leading Partners: New York Immigration Coalition, International Institute of Buffalo, Journey's End, Burmese Community Services, Center for Elder Law and Justice, University at Buffalo School of Social Work, ACCESS of WNY

7. Fund Public Transportation Emergency Relief, Expansion, and Improvement

NYS should invest in public transit with dedicated funds from its “Cap & Invest” mechanism within the planned multi-state Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI). These transit investments should expand high capacity, low carbon transit and improve bus service. Also, the federal legislature should pass legislation that supports transit to ensure the survival of public transit and the advancement of equity goals nationwide.

Leading Partners: Citizens for Regional Transit, Buffalo Transit Riders United

8. Promote Local Home Ownership by Changing the City of Buffalo Auction

The City of Buffalo should prioritize city resident buyers in the annual In-Rem foreclosure auction. Most local buyers cannot compete with the many out-of-town investors who bring big bucks to the auction and drastically bid up properties. Yet, studies have shown that local owners are more likely than out-of-town investors to be involved in the local community. The City should also integrate grant funding opportunities for low and moderate-income buyers to help them fix up the properties purchased at the auction. This will help to create local homeowners, and also create a sense of ownership and community building.

Leading Partner: Buffalo Information Sharing Collective

9. Stop the Practice of Stationing Off-Duty Police Officers in Buffalo Public Schools

The Buffalo Public School Board should ban the practice of employing off-duty police officers in schools. Removing these off-duty police from schools will reduce the amount of negative police-civilian interactions that occur in schools and the chances of unconstitutional interrogations of children in schools. In schools where these officers are stationed, the student makeup is majority Black. Ending the practice of off-duty police officers in schools will reduce the criminalization of Black children and advance racial justice.

Leading Partners: District Parent Coordinating Council, Citizen Action, We The Parents, Minority Bar Association, Free the People WNY

10. Invest in Just Streets, Not Enforcement

The City of Buffalo should invest in Just Streets, which means using design and traffic calming infrastructure (instead of surveillance and police) to keep streets safe. The city should also invest in unarmed, non-police traffic safety jobs for Buffalo residents in underserved communities. This would be a more equitable use of public funds instead of funding traffic safety through the police department. These initiatives can be funded in part using money already captured by the school speed zone cameras. These changes will create jobs and eliminate racist, punitive, and extractive traffic safety practices by the Buffalo Police Department. Overall, investing in Just Streets—including the removal of both traffic police and traffic cameras—can create safer streets for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. It will also strengthen local businesses and home values by creating more walkable and vibrant communities.

Leading Partners: Fair Fines and Fees Coalition of Buffalo, Western New York Law Center, Fines and Fees Justice Center, African American Health Disparities Task Force, WNY Peace Center & Interfaith Peace Network, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East & The Healthcare Education Project, National Federation for Just Communities of WNY, Black Love Resists in the Rust, National Center for Law and Economic Justice, Center for Constitutional Rights, University at Buffalo School of Law’s Civil Liberties and Transparency Clinic, Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition, Open Buffalo, VOICE Buffalo, Citizen Action, GoBike Buffalo



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