



## 2022 Community Agenda

### 1) 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 create a comprehensive, neighborhood-led plan for publicly-owned vacant land within the city. This plan should permanently reserve a significant portion of publicly-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 of WNY, Fruit Belt Community Land Trust, PUSH Buffalo, Broadway-Fillmore NHS, WNY Youth Climate Council, Greater East Side Field of Dreams Block Club, CopperTown Block Club, Fillmore Forward, Broadway-Fillmore Block Club, Barakah Community Garden, Buffalo Freedom Gardens, Box Ave Block Club, UB Food Lab.

### 2) A Comprehensive Well-Supported Cultural Plan for Buffalo and Erie County

The City of Buffalo should support the creation of a comprehensive Cultural Plan for Buffalo & Erie County. The county has already declared its support for this plan. The vision of City full support includes: (1) commitment of \$10,000 to the planning process, beginning in 2022, (2) designation of a high-level official to participate in the steering committee, and (3) creation of a \$500,000 line item in the annual budget for arts and cultural funding. This fund should prioritize small, midsized & grassroots organizations and be distributed in a transparent and accessible way.

Leading partners: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Arts Services Initiative of WNY, Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo Center for Arts & Technology, Buffalo Moose Group, The Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, Burchfield Penney Art Center, El Museo, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY, Inc., Just Buffalo Literary Center,

Locust Street Art, Los Artistas del Barrio Buffalo, Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor, MusicalFare Theatre, Penn Dixie Fossil Park and Nature Reserve, Road Less Traveled Productions, Sheas Performing Arts Center, Spark Filmmakers Collaborative, Ujima Company, Inc., Young Audiences of WNY, WNY Book Arts Center.

### **3) Public Banking: Public Money for Public Good**

The New York State Legislature and Governor Kathy Hochul should enact the NY Public Bank Act ([S1762A/A5782](#)). This bill would create a safe regulatory framework for cities, counties, and regions in New York to create public banks. Currently, our municipalities store their multimillion dollar budgets in for-profit banks. These for-profit banks then capitalize on municipal funds by investing them in the private market, including in health-harming industries like fossil fuels and privatized prisons. Instead, our municipalities should store their funds in public banks. These banks will then invest in *local* initiatives like small businesses, affordable housing, green infrastructure and more.

Leading Partners: WNY Law Center, Buffalo Urban League, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Belmont Housing, PUSH Buffalo, Cooperation Buffalo, Coalition for Economic Justice, New York State Equity Agenda, Public Bank NYC, Rochester Public Banking Coalition.

### **4) The Forgotten Population: Foster Care Youth, Young Adults, and Alumni**

The City of Buffalo should ensure special access to city services for young people who recently graduated from foster care. Young adults who have aged out of the foster care system are among the most underserved and underrepresented populations in our city. Once they transition out of the County foster care system, the City could offer specialized support through its youth services department, housing support services and funding, and employment programs, for example. This will help foster care alumni to receive the resources, skills training, and assistance that they need to live full, sustainable, and successful lives.

Leading partners: Fostering Greatness, Independent Contractors Guild of WNY (ICG), Craft Technical Institute (CTI), Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME), Child and Family Services, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), CAI and HOPE Buffalo.

### **5) Institute Independent Police Oversight in the City of Buffalo**

Buffalo Common Council should institute an independent police oversight model, a recommendation from the Buffalo Police Advisory Board in its [Spring 2020 report](#). This proposal would create a two-pronged model, establishing two independent civilian bodies

with independent legal counsel—free of political appointments—to investigate incidents and review and reform Buffalo Police Department policy where necessary.

Leading Partners: Free the People WNY, Buffalo Police Advisory Board, VOICE Buffalo.

## 6) Expand Language Access at All Levels of Government

New York State, Erie County and the City of Buffalo should make their public services accessible to limited English proficiency (LEP) individuals. For the Erie County legislature, this means passing a comprehensive Language Access law and fully implementing it as intended, with adequate funding. For the New York State legislature, this means passing and fully implementing Bill [S5236/A7428A](#) in 2022, which will expand and strengthen language access at state-run agencies in Western New York. The City should follow the lead of the state and county governments by passing a comprehensive language access policy for all city departments in 2022.

Leading partners: International Institute of Buffalo, Journey’s End Refugee Services, Burmese Community Services, New York Immigration Coalition, University at Buffalo School of Social Work, and ACCESS of WNY.

## 7) Buffalo Tenant Bill of Rights

The City of Buffalo should amend its charter to include the [Buffalo Tenant Bill of Rights](#) (TBoR). The TBoR was created by tenants most affected by evictions, slumlords, unsafe housing, and gentrification. It includes ten rights that would protect tenants against evictions without good cause, ensure timely repairs, reaffirm the right to language access in housing court proceedings, allow tenants to purchase their home when it goes up for sale, and more. If enacted, these rights would encourage stronger neighborhoods, establish stability for tenants, and would prevent displacement.

Leading Partners: PUSH Buffalo, Coalition for Economic Justice, OPEN Buffalo, Ujima Theater, Our City Buffalo, Queers for Racial Justice, Journey’s End Refugee Services, 1199 SEIU Healthcare Workers, Buffalo Mutual Aid Network, Housing Justice for All.

## 8) Improving Water Equity for Buffalo Residents

The Buffalo Water Board should (1) commit in writing to end all future water shutoffs for nonpayment of bills by low-income customers, (2) notify all customers of eligibility for reduced, affordable rates for low-income customers, and (3) implement the \$13 million water debt forgiveness program that the City included in its Buffalo Transformation Fund plan. Over 30,000 Buffalo Water customers remain behind on their water bills. Mayor Brown announced water debt forgiveness and the permanent end of water shut offs in 2021, but these policies have not yet been adopted by the Water Board. Buffalonians

deserve a written guarantee that the Mayor’s commitments are in effect, and that inhumane water shutoffs will not resume.

Leading partners: WNY Law Center, New York Water Justice Coalition, PUSH Buffalo, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Food and Water Watch, the Public Utility Law Project, Freshwater Future, the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, Environmental Advocates of New York, NAACP.

**9) Establish an Office of Sustainability in Buffalo to Ensure Climate Justice for All**

The City of Buffalo should create and fully fund an Office of Sustainability. This office would include at least two full-time staff members, an established budget, and formal community involvement protocols. This office will serve as a hub to connect community groups with grant writing capacity and other resources to secure funding for community-led climate justice projects. Climate change is the single most important threat of our time. We need strong municipal coordination to ensure that we are working together locally and are in alignment with state and federal climate initiatives.

Leading partners: WNY Youth Climate Council, WNY Environmental Alliance.

**10) Leverage New Fair Housing Laws and Create Incentives to Dismantle Regional Segregation in Erie County**

Erie County should adopt policies to reduce racial housing segregation. For example, it could create incentives for municipalities to increase zoning density and reduce parking restrictions on new-build projects. As a federal grant recipient, the county has a legal obligation to promote fair housing and decrease segregation. Western New York is one of the most segregated regions in the nation. Countless opportunities exist for the county to be a leader in reducing segregation. Increasing zoning density, for example, would encourage the creation of affordable housing in towns across the county, not just in the City of Buffalo, where affordable housing is often built. By incentivizing the creation of affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods, the county will move toward a future in which residents have meaningful choices for where they live. In a world where zip codes are closely correlated with life opportunities, meaningful choices translate into better educations, jobs, and health for people of color.

Leading partners: University at Buffalo School of Law Civil Rights & Transparency Clinic, Housing Opportunities Made Equal.

**11) Make the City of Buffalo Auction Work for Buffalo Residents**

The City of Buffalo should prioritize city resident buyers and owner-occupiers 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 increase local homeownership and will create a sense of both ownership and community building.

Leading partner: Buffalo Information Sharing Collective (BISC).