



2023 Community Agenda

1. Public Land for Public Benefit

The City of Buffalo should create a vacant land pilot program that prioritizes neighborhood-based decision making and equitable, sustainable use of public land in Broadway Fillmore. Possible vacant land uses include affordable housing, community gardens, passive green space, urban farming, recreation, public art, and more. The pilot project will serve as a case study and support a long-term goal of a comprehensive public land disposition policy for the city. This policy should center community agency and control over public land through mechanisms such as equitable land transfers and homesteading policies.

Leading Partners: Grassroots Gardens of WNY, Fillmore Forward, The Tool Library, Greater East Side Fields of Dreams Block Club, Impacted Families Project, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, University District Block Club, Matt Urban Center, PUSH Buffalo, Coppertown Block Club, Broadway Neighborhood Housing Services, Fruit Belt Advisory Council, Food for the Spirit

2. Pilot a Community Responder Team in Erie County

Erie County should fund and implement a community responder pilot program that works independently from the police. Community responder teams address low-risk 9-1-1 calls related to behavioral health needs, social disturbances, and/or quality of life concerns. These are calls that do not involve violence, weapons, or alleged crime. Each team will include a paramedic, mental health clinician, and trained peer worker. Upon arrival, the team will assess, de-escalate, problem-solve, and provide services on-site as needed. They will also link and/or transport people to appropriate services for longer-term care. Erie County should create an oversight body made up of peers and frontline community members to guide the planning and implementation of this program.

Leading Partners: Partnership for the Public Good, VOICE Buffalo, Evergreen Health, Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition, Little People's Victory, Social Welfare Action

Alliance—Buffalo Chapter, Recovery Options Made Easy, Best Self Behavioral Health, Black Love Resists in the Rust

3. Pass the Good Food NY Bill to Advance Values-Based Food Purchasing at Local Public Institutions

New York State should pass the Good Food NY Bill (S.7534/A.8580). This bill will amend New York’s “lowest responsible bidder law” to allow municipalities to follow values-based procurement. With this change, municipal governments could prioritize purchasing from small and midsize farms, producers, and suppliers that are local and/or utilize better labor, animal welfare, and environmental practices instead of purchasing from mega-agribusiness. This bill aims to bring transparency and center racial equity in New York’s food system, while keeping more municipal dollars in our local economies. Buffalo Public Schools alone spends almost \$14 million on food every year. This money could be shifted to local businesses and farms such as Urban Fruits and Veggies and Providence Farm Collective.

Leading Partners: African Heritage Food Co-op, Buffalo Food Equity Network, Buffalo Parent-Teacher Organization, Buffalo Teacher Federation, CoNECT, Designing to Live Sustainably, Food for the Spirit, Fruit Belt Advisory Council, Grassroots Gardens WNY, Massachusetts Avenue Project, Gro-operative Inc., NeuWater & Associates, NOFA-NY, Open Buffalo, Partnership for the Public Good, Pelion School Garden, Providence Farm Collective, Rust Belt Harvest, Sierra Club Niagara Group, SPCA Serving Erie County, UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, Urban Fruits & Veggies, WNY Area Labor Federation, WNY Council on Occupational Safety & Health, WNY Environmental Alliance

4. Freeing Sidewalks and Bus Stops of Ice and Snow

The City of Buffalo should fund a pilot program to remove snow and ice from city sidewalks, bus stops, and shelters along the most active NFTA-Metro transit routes. The program should resemble the 2021 pilot in Syracuse, NY, where the city appropriated \$650,000 to clear 100 miles of sidewalk. The program removes snow on sidewalks after a snow event of three inches or more. By the June 2023 budget deadline, Mayor Brown should propose—and Common Council should adopt—funding for this pilot program. Currently, when it snows in Buffalo, many sections of the sidewalk go un-shoveled. This is a safety hazard and travel barrier for public transportation riders, disabled individuals,

the elderly, and many more residents. A municipal snow removal program will ensure that all people can move freely and safely around the city to fulfill their daily needs.

Leading Partners: Citizens for Regional Transit, Buffalo Transit Riders United, GOBike Buffalo, Greater East Side Field of Dreams Block Club, Buffalo Democratic Socialists of America

5. Strengthen the City of Buffalo Office of New Americans to Increase Support and Services for Refugees and Immigrants

The City of Buffalo should strengthen its Office of New Americans (ONA) by funding three full-time staff members. The ONA can then support leadership development, community organization formation, interpretation services (including dialect-specific services) for refugees and immigrants, and other support services. At least one of these new hires should be a person from the refugee community. Currently, refugees only receive three to six months of support from resettlement agencies after they arrive in Buffalo. Yet, navigating the system is still a struggle for refugees after this time, and community leaders who speak their language often help these new Americans. Many community leaders have developed organizations and groups to provide these services, but they lack the resources and information to become registered nonprofit organizations. As a result, they miss out on potential grant funds and government support. A fully-staffed ONA could help these critical community groups get off the ground and thrive, widely extending the impact of the ONA through their work.

Leading Partners: Providence Farm Collective, Liberian Association of Buffalo, Somali Bantu Community of Buffalo, Congolese Community of Buffalo, Karenni Community of Buffalo, Ethiopian Community of Buffalo, Buffalo Myanmar Community of Buffalo, Burundi Community of Buffalo

6. Re-Establish Annual Funding for the Arts in the City of Buffalo

The City of Buffalo should re-establish an annual process for arts and cultural funding with a designated budget line item of at least \$500,000. It should prioritize small and mid-sized grassroots organizations, and the funds should be distributed in a transparent, clear, and accessible way. This funding will recognize the greater economic and community-wide impact of the arts, and it will support critical arts services in low-income communities and communities of color in our city.

Leading Partners: Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance, Arts Services Initiative of WNY, Buffalo Arts Studio, Burchfield Penney Art Center, El Museo, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY, Just Buffalo Literary Center, Locust Street Art, Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor, MusicalFare Theatre, Road Less Traveled Productions, Ujima Company, Young Audiences of WNY, WNY Book Arts Center, and more

7. Bring Human Rights into Jails and Prisons in Erie County

New York State and Erie County legislators should increase transparency in their incarceration systems to ensure full implementation of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act. The HALT Act was passed in 2021. It curbs torture by limiting solitary confinement, giving incarcerated people new rights, and focusing on rehabilitation rather than inflicting pain and harm. Unfortunately, local jails and prisons show no sign of adopting this focus, or of implementing the requirements of HALT. Traditional solitary is being used less, but solitary continues by other means, with expanded social isolation practices such as restrictions on visits, phone calls, packages, and correspondence. More transparency is needed so these violations of HALT can be documented and challenged. Our local and state legislators must work together to re-align local jail and prison policies with the principles and requirements New York State adopted in the HALT Act.

Leading Partners: #HALTsolitary WNY, Free the People WNY, Jails Justice Network

8. Expand Housing Choice to Reduce Regional Segregation

To reduce long-term regional housing segregation, Erie County should commit its community development funds to building at least five new affordable, accessible housing projects. These projects should result in at least 200 new affordable housing units, and they should be built along public transit lines in “high-opportunity” neighborhoods. Opportunity is measured by indicators like the presence of well-resourced, high-performing schools. Building housing alone will not end segregation. However, creating affordable housing in high opportunity areas is a proven strategy to expand housing choice and to reduce overall segregation.

Leading Partners: Civil Rights and Transparency Clinic at UB School of Law, Housing Opportunities Made Equal

9. Good Cause Eviction for the City of Buffalo

The City of Buffalo should pass Good Cause eviction. This policy requires a landlord to have a good reason to require a tenant to move. “Good causes” for eviction include non-payment of rent, damage to the unit, illegal use of the unit, and more. Good Cause eviction would also limit evictions due to major rent increases. Landlords should be able to increase rents alongside inflation; they can still do this under a Good Cause policy. However, if the landlord raises the rent in an extreme way, they can no longer evict tenants due to non-payment of rent. Adopting this approach helps to prevent egregious rent hikes and unfair evictions. Eviction disproportionately harms women of color and other vulnerable groups. People who are evicted are more likely to lose their jobs, have worse housing conditions in their new unit, worse health outcomes, and other negative outcomes. Passing a Good Cause eviction policy would protect paying tenants from being displaced without cause.

Leading Partners: PUSH Buffalo, Buffalo Democratic Socialists of America, Journey’s End Refugee Services, 10 7th Street Block Club, Housing Justice for All Coalition, Coalition for Economic Justice

10. Participatory Budgeting for Digital Inclusion

Governor Hochul should issue an Executive Order to require participatory budgeting for all digital inclusion dollars coming to New York State. This could be done through the NYS ConnectALL office, which is responsible for a statewide digital equity plan and administers over \$1 billion in public funds. Participatory budgeting should happen at the county-level, through New York State’s Regional Economic Development Councils in partnership with community organizations and regional digital equity coalitions. The

process could involve an open call for proposals; vetting and budget analysis by a committee of community members, community-based organizations, and government; public voting; and implementation. Examples of proposed projects could include building public-private partnerships to extend free wi-fi across communities, creating digital skills education centers, equipping anchor institutions such as libraries and community centers as wireless network distribution points, or exploring municipal broadband options.

Leading Partners: WNY Digital Equity Coalition, Allegany County Office of Planning, Highmark Health, People Inc, Bitwise Industries, John R. Oishei Foundation, Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation, Buffalo Bills Foundation, Literacy Buffalo, Tonawanda City School District, CASA Trinity, Literacy West, Universal Primary Care/Southern Tier Community Health Center Network, Cattaraugus-Allegany-Erie-Wyoming BOCES, M&T Bank, Villa Maria College, Center for Self-Advocacy, Mission: Ignite, WNY Library Resources Council, City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning, Niagara University Rose Bente Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Equality & Mission, WNY WiFi Warriors, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District, WNY Nonprofit Support Group, Erie1 BOCES, Orleans Digital Literacy Initiative, Healthy Community Alliance

11. Supporting a Forgotten Population: Funding Support for Foster Care Youth and Young Adults

Erie County should create a dedicated funding line in its annual budget to support foster care alumni. These funds could be used for youth services, housing support services, employment programs, and health and mental health services. In Erie County, services for young people who recently graduated from foster care are extremely limited and difficult to access. Creating a dedicated funding line that supports necessary services will ensure that foster care alumni receive the resources, skills training, and assistance that they need to live full and successful lives.

Leading Partners: Fostering Greatness, Buffalo Urban League Foster Care Program, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Mental Health Advocates of WNY