

Public Safety Task Force Reviews 2012

By Carolyn Ristau

Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Garfield – The Public Safety Task Force (PSTF) has convened monthly in Garfield since 2000. At the table are representatives from the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), the Bureau of Police, other neighborhood organizations, the offices of the Mayor and City Council members, various city and county departments and the state.

The PSTF works to maintain the safety of residents of Garfield and neighboring areas and to address blight and abandonment in the community. At the meeting on Jan. 9, members shared several positive developments.

- Brandon Sewell was arrested in October a week after the shooting of Ne’Ondre Harbour at 408 N. Aiken Ave.; Sewell is the suspected perpetrator in this incident. George Johnson was arrested in December in connection with the retaliation shooting of Thomas Bey.

- Investigations are on-going into the 2012 shootings on N. Fairmont Street and the 5400 block of Broad Street and at Garfield Commons.

- While there were three murders in Garfield in fall 2012, they were the first in the neighborhood in two years. The police department at Zone 5 stepped up its enforcement efforts in the neighborhood, engaging with federal law enforcement as well. As a result of these efforts, criminal activity calmed down for the remainder of 2012.

- 730 Edmond Street has been boarded up and the owner has moved out of the city. In the past, this property was a magnet for disruptive activity.

- The BGC, in conjunction with the Mayor’s Office, is exploring the option of holding a gun buy-back this year, similar to ones held in the North Side community in previous years.



ABOVE: An upscale, Hawaiian-themed restaurant called Saiman will be located at the Penn Avenue address once occupied by the nightclub Envy. Photo by Paula Martinac

- The Bureau of Building Inspection (BBI) reported that demolition contracts are being put out for bid on the following abandoned houses: 5436 Hillcrest St., 5304 Hillcrest St., 5324 Hillcrest St., 5334 Hillcrest St. and 5408 Black St.

- BBI also reported that in 2012, 26 buildings in Garfield were demolished, most to make way for new housing. There are currently 26 condemned properties in Garfield.

- The BGC announced it will be doing a “windshield” survey of Garfield this year to determine which buildings should be condemned and demolished, which should be renovated and which are in good condition as is.

- A liquor license has been approved for Saiman, a new restaurant featuring Hawaiian cuisine coming soon to 4923 Penn Ave. (See photo.) The father and two sons who are partners in the new restaurant engaged with BGC and the nearby neighbors throughout the process of applying for the license.

- Finally, mark your calendars for the following Public Safety dates: June is National Public Safety Month; Aug. 6 is National Night Out; and Oct. 6-12 is National Fire Prevention Week.

Community members are invited to bring specific concerns to PSTF’s monthly meeting during the first 15 minutes. The next meeting will be held Wednesday, Feb. 13 at 4 p.m., in the BGC’s Community Activity Center, 113 N. Pacific Ave. ♦

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Stanton and N. Negley Avenues and convert it into a program and outreach center.

At a hearing in front of the City’s Zoning Board of Adjustment on Jan. 10th, Rev. William Curtis and his staff outlined their intentions for the property at 753 N. Negley Ave. if the City approves the change in use from what had been, most recently, a school for children with special needs. Rev. Curtis told the board that the church’s programming has outgrown its space on Paulson Avenue in Larimer, and that the new site would better enable them to serve their various constituencies in the East End.

“We would move our day-care and after-school programs to the new facility, along with recreation activities for children and adults in the community,” Rev. Curtis told the board. “We have grown from a congregation of 450 members when I started at Mt. Ararat to one of over 9,000 today.”

In addition to these services, Rev. Curtis said the new site would also house a food and clothing bank, a computer technology center, a mentoring project and a summer day camp. The hours of operation would typically be 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on most days. However, Curtis did state that the church will continue to “assess the needs in the community, so there is the possibility we could be adding some evening programming if we find that there’s a demand for it.”

The appearance at the zoning board hearing comes on the heels of several meetings with residents of Highland Park and representatives from three community organizations. Officials from the Highland Park Community Development Corporation and the Highland Park Community Club attended the zoning

hearing and spoke in favor of the church’s application.

David Hance, a Highland Park CDC board member, said, “We feel the track record of Mt. Ararat is a good one from what we’ve learned in those meetings, and appreciate the fact that church officials were willing to sit down with community interests and share their plans for the site.” He did acknowledge that his group would prefer that the change in use, if approved by the board, be allowed to expire if and when Mt. Ararat were to discontinue its programs at the facility and place the property up for sale or lease.

“The site is zoned for residential use, and there is a plan for Negley Avenue that was developed 15 years ago that advocates for it to remain as such,” Hance informed the board. “While we’re confident that Mt. Ararat will be a good neighbor, we think the best use of the property, long-term, is residential.” Monica Watt, president of the community club, echoed Hance’s comments.

However, Kirk Burkley, a zoning board member, advised the neighborhood representatives that there is no provision within the zoning code for a change in use to expire if Mt. Ararat were to sell the property to an entity that intended to continue with the same use.

Craig House Academy moved its school from Highland Park in 2010 to a new facility at S. Negley and Friendship Avenues less than a mile away, renaming it Friendship Academy in the process. The building was eventually sold by the Watson Institute, the parent arm of Craig House, at auction in 2011 to a private investor. However, a recent search of Allegheny County’s assessment registry failed to locate any record of the building. ♦



ABOVE: Mt. Ararat Baptist Church hopes to move some of its programs and services to the vacant Craig House Academy building on North Negley Avenue. Photo by Rick Swartz

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