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# ALLEGHENY WEST GAZETTE

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November 2017

## President's Message

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So what are you doing on Tuesday evening?

Join your neighbors on **Tuesday, November 14 at 7:30 P.M.** at Calvary Church for the **annual meeting** of the Allegheny West Civic Council.

Each month, of course, this is where we make decisions about our neighborhood—decisions that, in ways both small and large, will affect you. And we always have a good time socializing and enjoying refreshments while we're at it!

But each year in November, we also conduct our annual election of officers and committee chairs for the coming year. And at this meeting we will also review and adopt the Civic Council's budget for 2017-18.

Everyone is welcome—second Tuesday of each month, at 7:30 P.M., in the Calvary Church Social Hall, on the corner of Beech and Allegheny. (Use the Beech Avenue entrance.) The meeting is usually over by 9:00.

It's also a great way for newer folks to meet your neighbors and get involved! We hope to see you on Tuesday evening!

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As we continue to celebrate the Civic Council's 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, many of our newer neighbors may not know this next part of the Allegheny West story. So if you've ever wondered "where all of the money goes" from our annual House Tours—or why we always need to maintain serious reserve funds—read on.

By the mid-1970s, the members of the Allegheny West Civic Council had accomplished a great deal. In just over a decade since its founding, the AWCC was hosting one of the region's largest and most successful annual house tours: the Allegheny West Springfest, on the third weekend of May. In doing this, the AWCC had begun to attract younger newcomers, many of them choosing to rent or buy in the community after first discovering us by taking the tour and meeting their enthusiastic future neighbors.

At the same time that an influx of new residents was offering hope for a revival of the proud neighborhood, there was still plenty of ongoing physical deterioration—even the frequent loss of significant buildings to demolition. As it still is in 2017, the pure dollar economics of land value dictated that the "highest and best use" for all of the land in Allegheny West was as vacant surface parking lots to serve the many needs on our periphery. The income generated by this great demand for parking spaces couldn't be offset by other commercial or residential values. And so it was that great old buildings continued to be torn down for parking lots.

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Since the early 1970s, the row of six buildings at the corner of Western Avenue and Brighton Road had been crumbling rapidly. After a couple of small fires, a few collapsed roofs, and the demolition of the two buildings right at the corner, it was all too clear where the wrecking ball would be moving next.

Two of the newcomers, recent resident John Canning and realtor Jean Dittmer, joined fifteen-year-resident Alex Watson in advocating a radical concept: What if we could buy and restore all six of the dilapidated buildings at the corner? Just because nobody on the private market would do that, it didn't mean that we couldn't do it ourselves. Now all we needed was half a million dollars!

John, Jean, and Alex met endlessly with the foundation community for grants, and persuaded six different banks to each participate in a portion of the project's funding. To add even more direct neighborhood value to the project, it was designed with four small refurbished storefronts to attract new businesses to Western Avenue. Elsewhere in the buildings were a total of ten fresh apartments, kept affordable through rent subsidies so that folks who might be displaced from their longtime AW homes would be able to continue living here.

All of this would also set a standard for historic preservation that could serve to encourage other property owners. And it would be owned and managed by the AWCC to assure ongoing maintenance.

McIntosh Row was a monumental accomplishment—the first of its kind in Pittsburgh. But none of those proud neighbors who gathered to celebrate its completion in 1979 could have imagined what was to follow. The success of this first brick-and-mortar project would lead to many others by the Allegheny West Civic Council over the next four decades—many millions of dollars spent to save and restore endangered properties in every corner of the tiny neighborhood. It would also lead to the region's first Community Development Corporation.

But along with those moments of achievement there would also come times of great conflict. For those earlier speculators who had bought cheap property here in order to “sell high” when the bulldozers came, the attraction of new residents and businesses, enhancing the quality of life, and preserving old buildings had never been part of their plan.

The watershed decade of the 1980's was about to dawn . . .

— John DeSantis, AWCC President

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## **Support Allegheny West Businesses on Small Business Saturday**

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Remember to come out and support your local Allegheny West businesses on Small Business Saturday. This year, it will be Saturday, November 25. To learn more and see a video featuring Northside Businesses, visit Northside Shop Small at [www.bit.ly/northsideshopsmall](http://www.bit.ly/northsideshopsmall).

## AWCC Executive Board for 2018

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Below are the names for the 2018 AWCC Executive Board slate:

### Staying on for 2018:

**President:** John DeSantis

**Vice President:** Ann Gilligan

**Treasurer:** Dan Adam

**Secretary:** Michael Shealey

### Committee chairs:

**Housing and Planning:** Tim Zinn

**Way & Means:** Carol Gomrick

**Property:** Elaine Stone

**Friends of Allegheny West:** Trish Burton

**Sergeant of Arms:** Fran Barbush

**Membership:** Greg Coll

**Communications:** Diane Caruso

## Old Allegheny Victorian Christmas House Tour

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The Tour is shaping up for December 8 and 9. Here are the updates:

1. Flyers are going into the mail. A big thanks to Trish Burton for coordinating the effort...once again, it went off like clockwork. Thanks also to Greg Coll for designing and managing the printing. The flyers are lovely. A big thank you from Carol and Trish to all who helped put address labels on the 8008 (!) postcards that we'll be sending to advertise the tour. A special thanks to Quentin Lane and Charlie and Eli Sweeney for giving up homework time to help us set a new record! We have extra postcards available should anyone want to distribute to coworkers and friends, or to post on community bulletin boards.
2. Next up, putting the swags together. We'll be meeting at Cathy and Gene's house on December 2nd at 9:00 A.M. Please come and help. The swags help make the entire neighborhood look so special for the tour guests. In addition to putting them together, we'll be looking for volunteers to help hang the swags.
3. We're still on the hunt for the final house. Please consider joining the tour this year. Contact Carol ASAP at carolgomrick@gmail.com.
4. If you haven't signed up to volunteer yet, please reach out to Doug Sprague at doug.osrg@gmail.com.
5. There are so many people who continue to help behind the scenes to make the tour successful every year. Thank you for your efforts and support!

## Volunteers Needed at the Parklet Pull-out

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This **Sunday, November 12**, we'll be hosting a "Parklet Pull-out" to remove annuals. Please meet at the corner of Western & Brighton at **NOON**. We'd really appreciate if volunteers could come and help out for at least a half hour.

Thank you!

-Trish Burton &amp; Diane Caruso

## AWCC Calendar

**Tuesday, November 14 @ 7:30 p.m.**

General Membership Meeting @ Calvary Church

**Tuesday, November 21 @ 7:30 p.m.**

Housing & Planning Committee Meeting, @ AWCC Office (806 Western)

**Tuesday, November 28 @ 7:30 p.m.**

Executive Committee Meeting, @AWCC Office (806 Western)

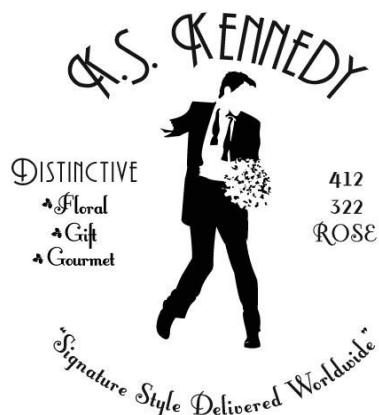
**Saturday, December 2 @ 9:00 a.m.**

Greens bundling at Cathy & Gene's house: 851 Beech Ave.

### Reminders:

\*Street Sweeping November 13th and 14th

\*Lawn & Leaf pick-up on November 18th



## DRAFT Agenda: AWCC Membership Meeting

Tuesday, November 14 at 7:30 P.M.

- Visitors
  - Councilwoman Harris's office
  - Mayor Peduto's office
  - Pittsburgh Police Zone 1
  - Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy – Allegheny Commons
- New neighbors and guests
- Reading of previous meeting's minutes
- Treasurer's report: Adoption of 2017/2018 Budget
- Committee reports
  - Membership
    - November Mixer
    - AW Bowling at the Elks
  - Ways & Means
    - AW Christmas Candelight House Tour (12/8 & 12/9)
    - Update on five-year Calvary contract
  - Friends of Allegheny West - Green Space
  - Property
  - Housing & Planning updates
    - Parking & traffic issues
    - Blocks bounded by Western, Allegheny, Ridge, Bridge, MCC
    - Western Avenue revitalization
    - Light of Life Ridge Avenue project
    - Allegheny Commons update of 2002 Master Plan
    - Expansion of Historic District (LRC report)
    - Historic District enforcement issues – old cases
    - ZBA Appeal, new city zoning - Medical Marijuana Dispensary
    - Air BnB issues/impacts in AW
    - Comprehensive guidelines for new construction on vacant sites
    - Revised AW Film Guidelines
- Northside Leadership Conference
  - Allegheny General Hospital Institutional Master Plan
- Old Business
- New Business
- Annual election of officers & committee chairs
- Adjournment

## The Allegheny West Gazette

Editor: Karen Haller Beer

The monthly newsletter of the Allegheny West Civic Council. Letters, submissions, advertising and other notices by the first of the month to: [gazette@alleghenywest.org](mailto:gazette@alleghenywest.org). Submission does not guarantee publication.

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