



Worchester Common Ground

Annual Report



Worchester Common Ground
5 Piedmont Street
Worcester, MA 01610
508.754.0908
www.wgcgdc.org



Our Mission...

The mission of WCG is to promote and develop permanent and sustainable improvement in the neighborhoods of Central Worcester through affordable housing, community activism and economic development. We act as a developer of last resort, rehabilitating abandoned housing and acquiring parcels of vacant land for new construction to provide area residents with affordable rental units, the opportunity to own their own home, and an avenue to contribute to an increased level of neighborhood investment, pride and stability.

Worcester Common Ground has changed my life, literally in every way. I probably wasn't the best candidate for an apartment, but I got it anyway. It is clean, gorgeous, and well-maintained. Even when I lost all my disability support, they stepped in to help. I asked for accommodation after accommodation and despite misgivings, received them. And with these my life has changed. I walk through the neighborhood with my ESA, say hello to people I know, and see so many wonderful signs of WCG's presence. When I pass a home and think, "that looks good," it's always one of theirs. Same with the vegetable gardens. For the past four years, I have been lucky enough to participate in the Dismas House CSA and receive a veggie box each week. My heart has been touched by the kindness shown by the office staff. I am so grateful for all of you and this place!

Cathleen Trotta, WCG resident



Thank You Donors

FY2018

Individual Gifts & Membership

Simon & Nancy Gregory	Anonymous donor In Memory of Marge Purves
Melvin S Cutler Charitable Foundation	Committee to Elect Harriette Chandler
Dell Giving / Your Cause LLC	Jeanette Melendez
Kris Knight	

Corporate Contributions

College of the Holy Cross	Fallon Health
Cornerstone Bank	

Grants

Claretian Missionaries - U.S.A. Province	DCU for Kids
First Church Sterling	Worcester District Attorney's Office
UnitedBank Foundation	Dismas House of MA Inc (Dominican Sisters)
WebsterFive Foundation	People's United Community Foundation
Country Bank for Savings	Greater Worcester Community Foundation
Plourde Family Charitable Trust	

Community Investment Tax Credits

Sandra Rose and Joseph Bearak	Elizabeth and Jeff H. Wallace
United Way 2017 and 2018 Distribution	BlueHub Capital
Santander	Gloria Hall
Davis Square Architects	Curtis Construction Company, Inc.
Fletcher Foundation	Ellsworth Foundation
Stoddard Charitable Trust	

2018 FUNDERS AND FINANCIAL PARTNERS



Episcopal Diocese of Western MA
 Plourde Family Charitable Trust
 Stoddard Charitable Trust
 Melvin S. Cutler Charitable Foundation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Letter from the Director and Board Chair.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Board of Directors.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Meet our Staff and Interns.....</i>	<i>3-4</i>
<i>Target Area.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Neighborhood Snapshot.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Housing Projects.....</i>	<i>7-8</i>
<i>Pipeline.....</i>	<i>9-10</i>
<i>Housing Plus.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Bioshelter.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Financials.....</i>	<i>13-14</i>
<i>Donors and Sponsors.....</i>	<i>15-16</i>

A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR and BOARD CHAIR

As we approach the end of another year of building affordable housing, stabilizing green spaces, working with our residents to provide services, and of course youth engagement activities, we pause to thank all of you in our neighborhoods for your involvement with Worcester Common Ground. It is all of you that make our neighborhoods vibrant and strong.

In 2019, WCG turned 22 Newbury Street into a pocket park and with our neighbors, dedicated this park to our past WCG Clerk and Crown Hill resident Marge Purves. The park is now available to residents to plant veggies in the raised beds, hold birthday parties and other special events, or just enjoy the surrounding area. As a force together we were able to reclaim this once dumping ground to a place of peace. Our Community Organizer continues to work with members of PACT (Pleasant Street Area Community) Team to address concerns expressed at our meetings held once a month. With support from many neighbors, first time homebuyers, Worcester Police Department, and Code, we continue to work as a team to tackle issues impeding our neighborhood. We are grateful for residents that come forth and share the issues they face so that WCG can organize to help mitigate problems. Our other ongoing community works include the Trinity Winter Basketball League, Summer Basketball League with Cruz4more, Bioshelter, Dismas House Farm Share Program, and EAT Centers. These continue to be meaningful experiences for our residents, neighbors and refugee farmers. We thank our residents and neighbors for taking the time to be part of these events and our incredible volunteers who help us to make it happen, especially our invaluable interns.

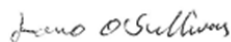
Some of the 2019 housing highlights include our most notable project, the completion of 20 Merrick Street, which will become a home to a first-time homebuyer. The ribbon cutting in October was a heartfelt celebration with our building partners including, Training Resources of America (YouthBuild Worcester), Saint Gobain of Worcester, and our funders that helped bring this project to fruition. Funding was provided by Santander Bank, CharlesBank Homes, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, People's United Bank, Berkshire Bank, Kuehn Foundation, Episcopal Dioceses of Western MA, CEDAC, along with our Community Investment Tax Credit investors...just to name a few. WCG is fortunate to have this collaboration and we are thankful to our partners. In 2019 WCG was awarded funds by the Commonwealth to create our 126 Chandler Street project. By July of 2021 we will provide 31 units of affordable housing, an expansive community space, and a commercial venue.

Affordable housing remains a struggle for 50% of those currently living in Worcester and earning incomes below the median income range. The fact is, our country can show precious few, if any, examples of successfully developing and supporting economically diverse neighborhoods. Those with less have been consistently pushed out of their neighborhoods to create a more "comfortable" environment for those that have more. WCG fully intends to continue its work with the City of Worcester to help implement a future of affordable housing in our neighborhoods. We hope you will continue to work with us, so your voices are heard.

Sincerely,



Yvette Dyson – Executive Director



Jono O'Sullivan – Board Chair

WORCESTER COMMON GROUND, INC. AND ITS SUBSIDIARIES

Changes in net assets without donor restrictions

Revenues, Supports and Gains

Rental income	1,408,066
Program service fees	18,440
Grans and contributions	233,733
Interest and miscellaneous	13,479
Developer & overhead fees	-
Total revenues, support and gains without donor restrictions	\$ 1,673,718

Expenses:

Program service	986,523
Management and general	118,920
Subsidiaries expenses	1,643,775
Total Expenses	\$ 2,749,218

Changes in net assets without donor restrictions

(1,075,500)

Net assets, beginning of year

9,313,140

Net assets, end of year

\$ 8,237,650

Personnel and related costs—

Salary and wages	435,880
Payroll taxes and fringe benefits	103,219
Contracted services	47,766
Total personnel and related costs	\$ 586,864

Occupancy—

Depreciation and Amortization	840,517
Repairs, maintenance, rent and insurance	385,044
Real estate taxes	184,529
Utilities	179,504
Mortgage interest and other mortgage interest	341,394
Total occupancy	\$ 1,930,988

Other—

Professional fees	79,363
Liability insurance	78,908
Telephone and office	32,763
Miscellaneous, Conventions and conferences	26,275
Bad debts	8,721
Advertising, Dues and subscriptions	5,336
Total other	\$ 231,366
Total Expenses	\$ 2,497,2018

FINANCIALS

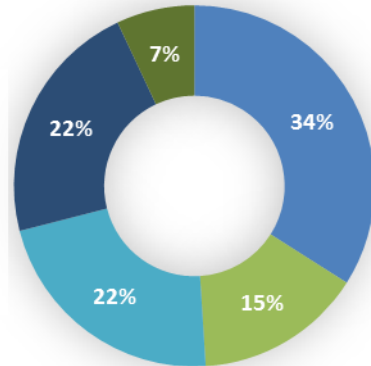
There are a couple key points to keep in mind when looking at financial statements from non-profit organizations such as Worcester Common Ground.

First, our rental properties have long term contingent liabilities attached to them. However, as a non-profit, much of that debt is forgiven in the future as long as Worcester Common Ground continues to meet these loans' requirements. When these contingent liabilities pass the affordability period, they are then booked as income to our financial statement.

Second, as a provider of housing to low income families who often need subsidies from various agencies to meet their rent obligations, WCG is subject to rental rates set by HUD. Furthermore, WCG is monitored by federal agencies to confirm that our families meet particular income qualifications. While we strive to minimize operating costs, maintaining quality properties while subject to rental rate caps sometimes means accepting losses.

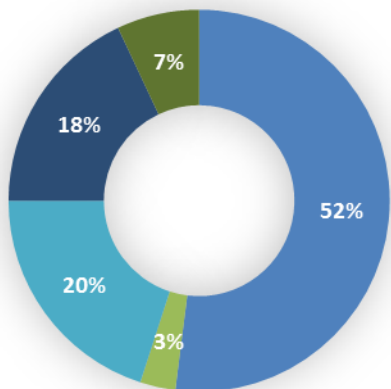
Expenses

- Personnel and Related Costs
- Depreciation and Amortization
- Repairs, Maintenance, Rent, and Insurance
- Other Occupancy Expenses
- Office



Income

- Rental Income
- Program Service Fees
- Grants and Contributions
- Interest and Miscellaneous
- Developer and Overhead Fees



Board of Directors

Our board, comprised of 70% neighborhood residents, promotes grassroots community action through leadership opportunities and capacity building.



Back: Eddie Jimenez, Jono O'Sullivan, Ramón Borges-Mendez, Robb Zarges
Front: Irene Irungu, Arline Rosario, Matt Evans, Rose Simbizi (not pictured)

- **Jono O'Sullivan (President):** Piedmont Resident and Business Owner
- **Robb Zarges (Treasurer):** Executive Director of The CASA Project
- **Matthew Evans (Clerk):** Director of Wellness for YMCA of Central Mass
- **Irene Irungu:** WCG Homeowner
- **Arline Rosario:** WCG Resident
- **Eddie Jimenez:** Owner of Eddie's Super Plaza
- **Ramón Borges-Mendez:** Piedmont Resident and Clark University Professor
- **Rose Simbizi:** WCG Homeowner



WCG Board Members and Staff attending the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC) 2019 Annual Meeting

MEET OUR STAFF



Yvette Dyson, *Executive Director*

Yvette has had the pleasure of serving the Piedmont Neighborhood for the past 20 years. Her first 13 years were spent as the Real Estate Development Director creating rental rehabilitation and First Time Homeownership opportunities throughout the Austin and Piedmont corridors. During that time she had the unique opportunity to work with many community members to determine neighborhood need, as she has helped to bring 128 affordable rental units and 18 First Time Homeownership properties to our community. Her background in real estate and community work gave her the opportunity to move forward within the organization to become the Executive Director in 2013. In the last five years she has learned the depths of WCG. With the help of her resident driven Board of Directors, committed staff, interns and volunteers she will continue to strengthen the organization into the future.



Ron Germain, *Facilities Manager*

Ron joined us in April 2004. He is responsible for the upkeep of all of our properties. With 10 buildings to keep under control he has achieved our goal of maintaining the best homes in the neighborhood. He also handles all inspections, move-in, move-outs, and annual inspection of Section 8 apartments. Ron has over 20 years of construction and property management experience. He was the manager from one of our contractors on several WCG development projects before joining us.



Jeshenia Luyando, *Property Manager & Tenant Relations*

Jeshenia joined us in March 2006. Her bilingual (English-Spanish) capability is complimented by her experience as a legal secretary and in social services for 10 years prior to her placement. She has expanded her responsibilities and, with equal proficiency, handles the function of office manager as well as her primary responsibility to keep our apartments in excellent condition and fully occupied. Her verification of income and status reporting to the state and city has secured us recognition as a 100% complete compliance organization - no small feat.

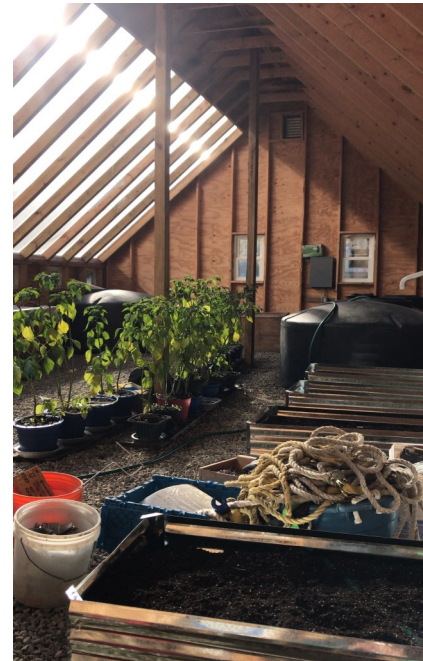


Joel Feinberg, *Real Estate Development Director*

Joel joined us in May, 2017, as our director of real estate development. He comes to us after almost 40 years as a real estate attorney, the last 20 of which were with the firm he helped found, Hackett Feinberg PC. In his law practice, Joel focused on work for community development corporations and non-profit organizations, as well as Massachusetts state agencies and institutional lenders, in community development and affordable housing transactions. He was often involved in multi-party transactions involving layers of public and private debt and equity and the use of governmental programs and tax incentives.

Jaques Ave Bioshelter + Urban Orchard Progress Report

While the outdoor garden beds flourished with produce and flowers galore, our Public Space Coordinator, Mikela Nolin, worked diligently to get the Bioshelter's system components up and running. We are excited to test out growing plants inside the Bioshelter for the first time this winter. Here is a crash course in how it works:



The bioshelter relies on a series of integrated systems to achieve self-sustainability and year long functionality.

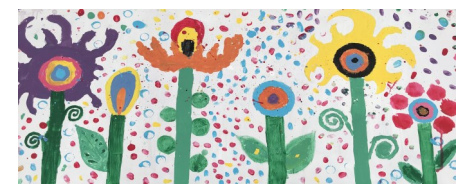
Climate Battery: a series of pipes 10 ft underground through which cold air is pumped in by a small duct fan, travels under the warm core of the Earth, and comes out at a warmer temperature so it may circulate throughout the structure.

Rainwater Catchment System: 40ft gutters along each side of the bioshelter funnel rainwater inside to three 550 gallon barrels. The dark color + large size of these barrels allows them to capture solar energy and retain great heat to assist with the passive heating processes.

Solar Panels: sustainable, renewable electricity

As we move into the winter, the structure will be able to maintain a temperature of at least 45 degrees so the plants our growers are cultivating inside (peppers, tomatoes, collard greens, avocados, bananas, and a fig tree) never freeze.

In July, students from the Nativity School of Worcester spent a week learning about the Bioshelter and creating a few art pieces which will be hung up on the inside walls.



Housing Plus

A model for community development

The CDC mission extends well beyond housing. We believe that resident engagement, community gardens, recreational spaces, and youth programming are key to creating a thriving, healthy community. A few highlights from this past year include: a 5th successful season of the Trinity Lutheran Basketball League; Working 4 Worcester cleanup at The Cage; summer basketball program at The Cage; improvements to the Bioshelter, Tot Lot, and Newbury St park with students from The Nativity school; and an end of summer BBQ at 22 Newbury Street with the neighbors.



Once a month, residents, business owners, and city officials gather at PACT (Pleasant Area Community Team) to discuss neighborhood challenges and share ideas. This past summer, we made an important effort to shift more toward an constructive, action-oriented meeting. Below are before and after photos of the intersection next to our Tot Lot playground.



Ellie Gilmore, Community Organizer

Ellie joined us in August 2017. She is responsible for door-to-door outreach in the Greater Piedmont neighborhoods, increasing the organization's engagement with residents and businesses, and building leadership opportunities for WCG tenants. She supports WCG's Community Land Trust leaseholders and rental tenants, and manages a wide range of community outreach activities. Ellie received her B.A. in Political Science from Clark University in 2017 and has been a Worcester resident since 2013. Her past work includes a variety of projects in youth work, policy research, fundraising, and event planning.



Mikela Nolin, Public Space Coordinator

Mikela joined us in March of 2019. She is currently pursuing her M.S. in Environmental Science and Policy at Clark University. Mikela organizes all Bioshelter needs —installation and monitoring of interior systems; managing the community garden between May and November. Other projects have included coordinating events with the Regional Environmental Council including Castle Street Garden cleanup; grant writing; and youth program facilitation.



Santa Sanchez, Public Space Maintenance Supervisor

Santa formally joined us in June 2019 as a seasonal maintenance supervisor for all of our public spaces. Born in Puerto Rico, Santa has been a Worcester resident since 2007. She brings an unparalleled work ethic to everything she does and always makes everyone laugh.

MEET OUR INTERNS

Taylor Miller—Spring 2019

Clark University (B.A. 2018, M.A. 2019)

Taylor organized our annual legislative event, Doughnuts with Delegates, including doing research on affordable housing policy. She expanded her experience with building asset management by assisting our property manager with inspections and creating an online maintenance request form for tenants.

Laura Linares—Spring 2019

Clark University (B.A. 2020)

Laura compiled resources on best practices for multi-lingual meeting facilitation, coordinated one of our REC Earth Day clean up sites, and conducted initial outreach to the Bioshelter farmers.

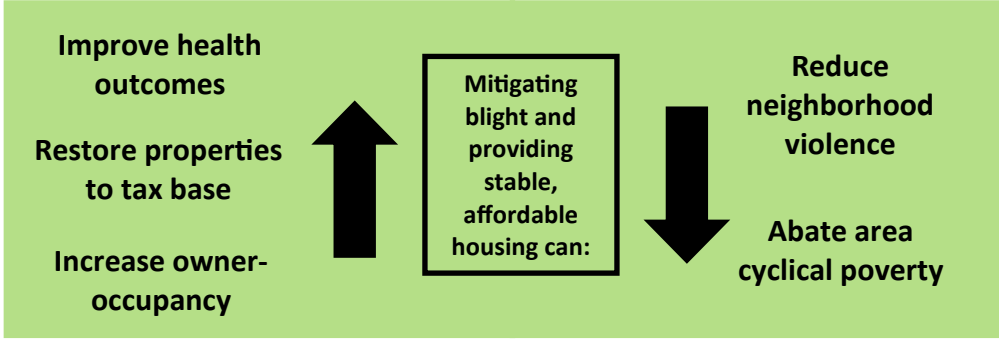
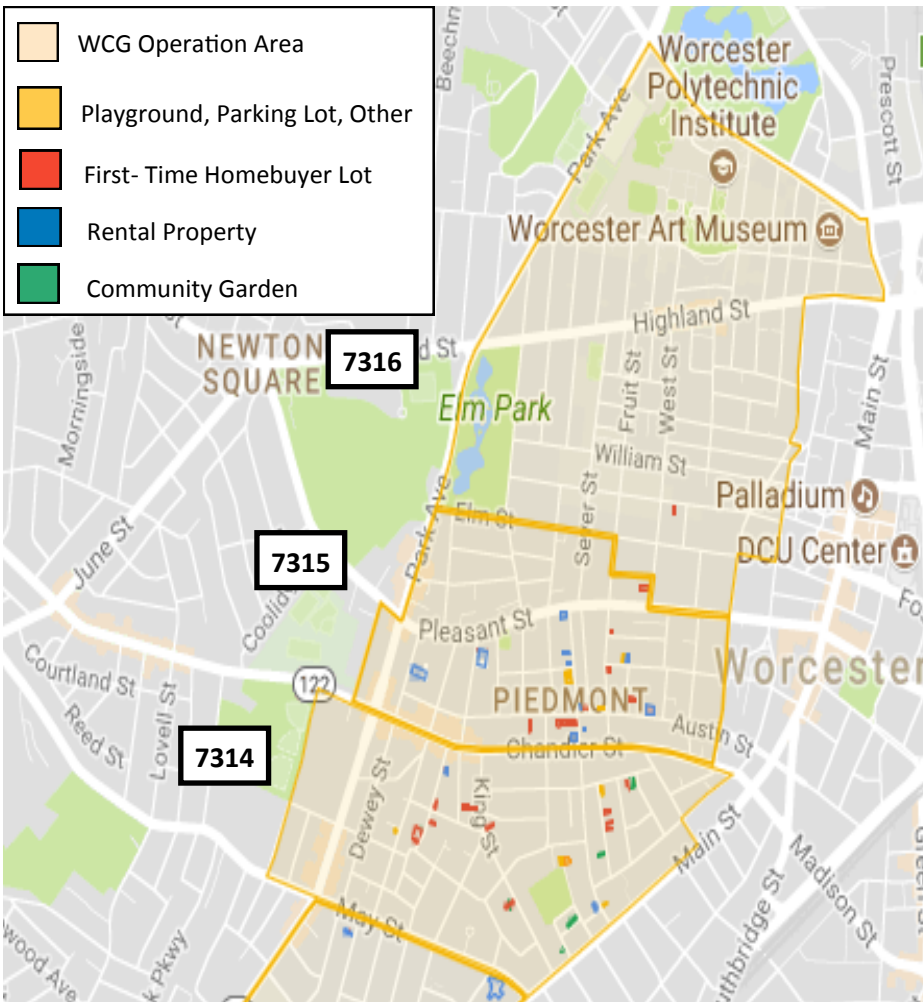
Eleanor Eaton—Summer 2019

Clark University (B.A. 2020, M.A. 2021)

Eleanor created a database of the abandoned, vacant, and blighted properties in the neighborhood. Her research included: land records, corporation search, tax payment history, notes from PACT, property photos. We currently use these resources and database to inform our potential pipeline projects.

TARGET AREA

Our target area, which we refer to as the Greater Piedmont Area, encompasses three census tracts, 7314, 7315 and 7316, within the City of Worcester (see map). These tracts are generally bound by Salisbury Street on the north, Main Street on the east, May Street on the south and Park Avenue on the west. The Greater Piedmont Neighborhoods consist of several neighborhoods with distinct identities that abut and at times, overlap each other. The most organized neighborhoods are Elm Park, Piedmont, Crown Hill, and Castle Street. The concentration of WCG development activity is in tracts 7314 and 7315. These neighborhoods extend from Pleasant Street south to May Street and present the most severe conditions of disinvestment, blight, and urban decay. An owner-occupancy rate of 10% and the high level of absentee landlords reinforce these conditions.



WCG homeownership properties are under a Community Land Trust ground lease model which ensures affordability in perpetuity.



Total acquisition costs for the properties pictured here is roughly \$835,000 [based on 2018 Tax Assessment data]



Creating a pipeline

Why blight mitigation stabilizes our neighborhood

The map illustrates the proximity of these properties to each other within a central section of the Piedmont neighborhood. Each property shown has one thing in common: absentee owner. Most of the owners do not reside in Worcester, are unresponsive to the Department of Inspectional Services, and have no relationship with abutters or residents.

We see these properties as key [de]stabilizers in the neighborhood. By cobbling them together for a pipeline, we can leverage various institutional and financial partners to help bring long term stability to Piedmont.



1 Identify

We maintain a close eye on potential properties through resident concerns and communication with the Dept. of Inspectional Services. Our Real Estate Development Director researches each property and creates relationships with the owner.



2 Procure

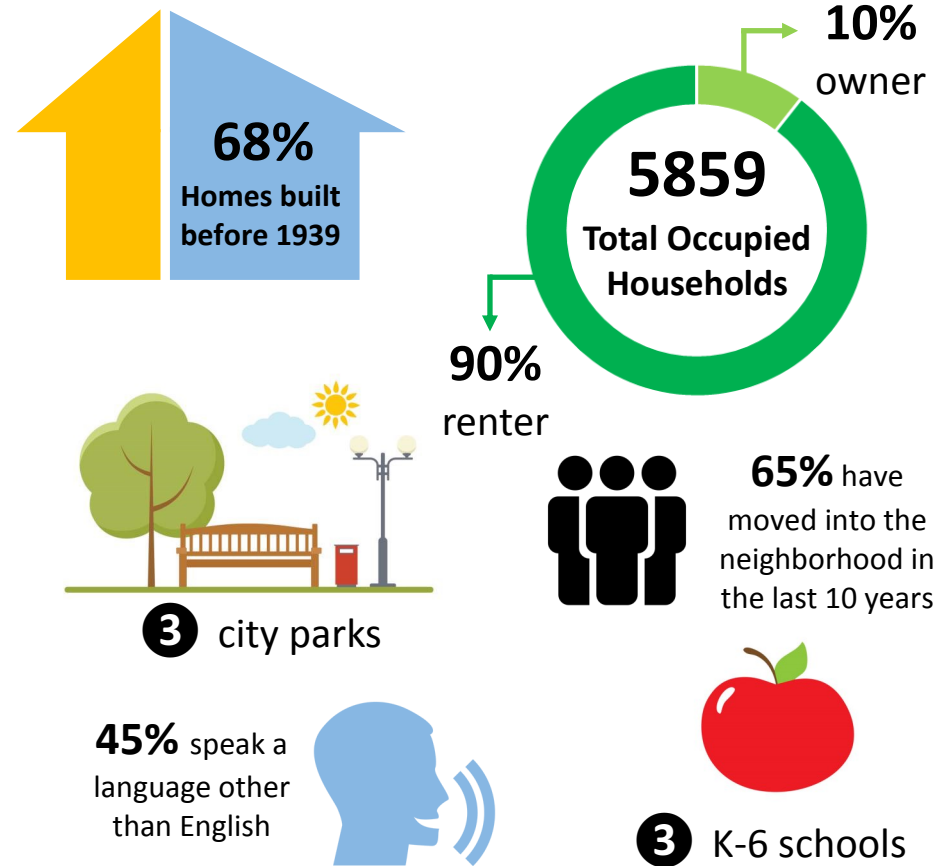
WCG can procure a property through the State's receivership process or through direct purchase. With rising property values, it is becoming cost-prohibitive for community development corporations to compete with outside investors.



3 Rehabilitate

Stabilizing blighted properties requires myriad public and private sector financing partnerships. Total project costs for 1 triple decker can be upwards of \$600,000 with acquisition and rehab. Completed projects become income-qualified rentals or homeownerships.

Neighborhood Snapshot



Median Family Income (MFI)



Data from American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017

20 Merrick Street

Sustainable building for a sustainable neighborhood

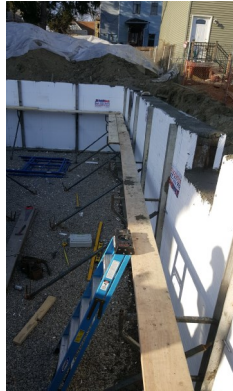
This year, we completed construction on our first highly energy efficient single-family home at 20 Merrick Street. Our Community Land Trust 'ground lease' model will ensure this property stays affordable in perpetuity. Homeownership is a key component of neighborhood stabilization and we hope the 20 Merrick Street model can be replicated across Piedmont.



BEFORE



AFTER



126 Chandler Street

Revitalization at work

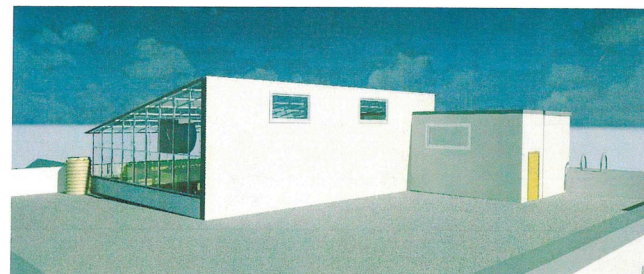
In summer 2019, we were selected as a recipient of the Department of Housing and Community Development's Affordable Rental Housing Awards. We are grateful to the following project funders: DHCD, City of Worcester, CEDAC, Episcopal Diocese of Western MA, Eastern Bank, Affordable Housing Trust and Life Initiative. We anticipate a July 2021 complete date.

31 units of affordable housing

1st floor commercial space

Community room with kitchen

Major rehab of longtime vacant razor factory + garage



Pending funds, we hope to construct WCG's first-ever rooftop garden for building residents to grow their own food. Urban agriculture is popular in the Piedmont neighborhood and a rooftop garden will meet that demand in an innovative way at 126 Chandler St.