

WORCESTER COMMON GROUND

ANNUAL REPORT 2020





A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Seems we can all agree that ending 2020 will be uplifting on many levels. The racial injustice that occurred was unconscionable, the ongoing COVID -19 pandemic continues to leave us with constant concern, and the political nature of our country has divided us. This does not fare well for our neighborhoods here in Worcester or in the United States at large. Let us hope that 2021 will build a democratic approach whereby these obstructions in our lives end and we begin bit by bit to rebuild. We need to mend the divide and be kind to each other.

That said, despite all harm, WCG did prevail as a CDC in these difficult times. Early January of 2020 we began our closing process for 126 Chandler Street. All 25 partners in this project had weekly conference calls to get to the closing on March 30th. amidst the shutdown. With housing being essential we began construction on April 6th. and here we are in November with only ten months to completion. We are hoping for a ribbon cutting and invite all of you to join us in July, but difficult to project at this moment in time.

Additionally, WCG completed a first- time homeownership property located at 20 Merrick Street and closed on this property with a very special owner and her 2 sons in July. It was the first of two properties that WCG partnered with St. Gobain, and Worcester Youthbuild, a division of Training Resources of America. The students did an amazing job alongside their wonderful mentors. New recruits with Worcester Youthbuild are currently underway with constructing 24 Merrick and we are again excited to provide this homeownership opportunity.

Just before COVID – 19 hit our Trinity Basketball teams played their hearts out ending the season with two teams for the playoffs. Elm Park and Chandler Elementary were headed to the final game when it was cancelled for the safety of all. Breaking those players, coaches and family's hearts was so difficult.

While most of our staff remained at home during March and April, we continued our outreach to our residents and neighborhood through PACT (Pleasant Street Area Community Team) via Zoom. While we have all grown tired of the endless zooms, it has proven to be a strong way to communicate for WCG. Our strategic planning, Board meetings and communication with our Worcester partners were kept alive by Zoom.

During these difficult times we were uplifted by our many funding partners, individual donors and grant makers who believe in our mission. We are grateful for the support from Greater Worcester Together and the Willow Tree Fund for providing the needed funds to help up operate and navigate the pandemic. Truly amazing how Worcester residents and leaders came together to provide the needed support during this ongoing crisis.

Our staff and Board of Directors continue to put broad thought into our organization as we move through these times. We have been meeting with our Strategic Planner, Diane Gordon who after seven years continues to work with us yearly to help us to address better and more meaningful ways to serve our community. We look forward to implementing changes in 2021.

YVETTE DYSON

Executive Director

JONO O'SULLIVAN

Board Chair

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Target Area

4

Community Land Trust

5

126 Chandler Street

6

Merrick Street Homeownership

7

Community Engagement

8

Green Spaces and Sustainability

10

Financials

12

Staff

14

CITCs and 2019 Funders

16

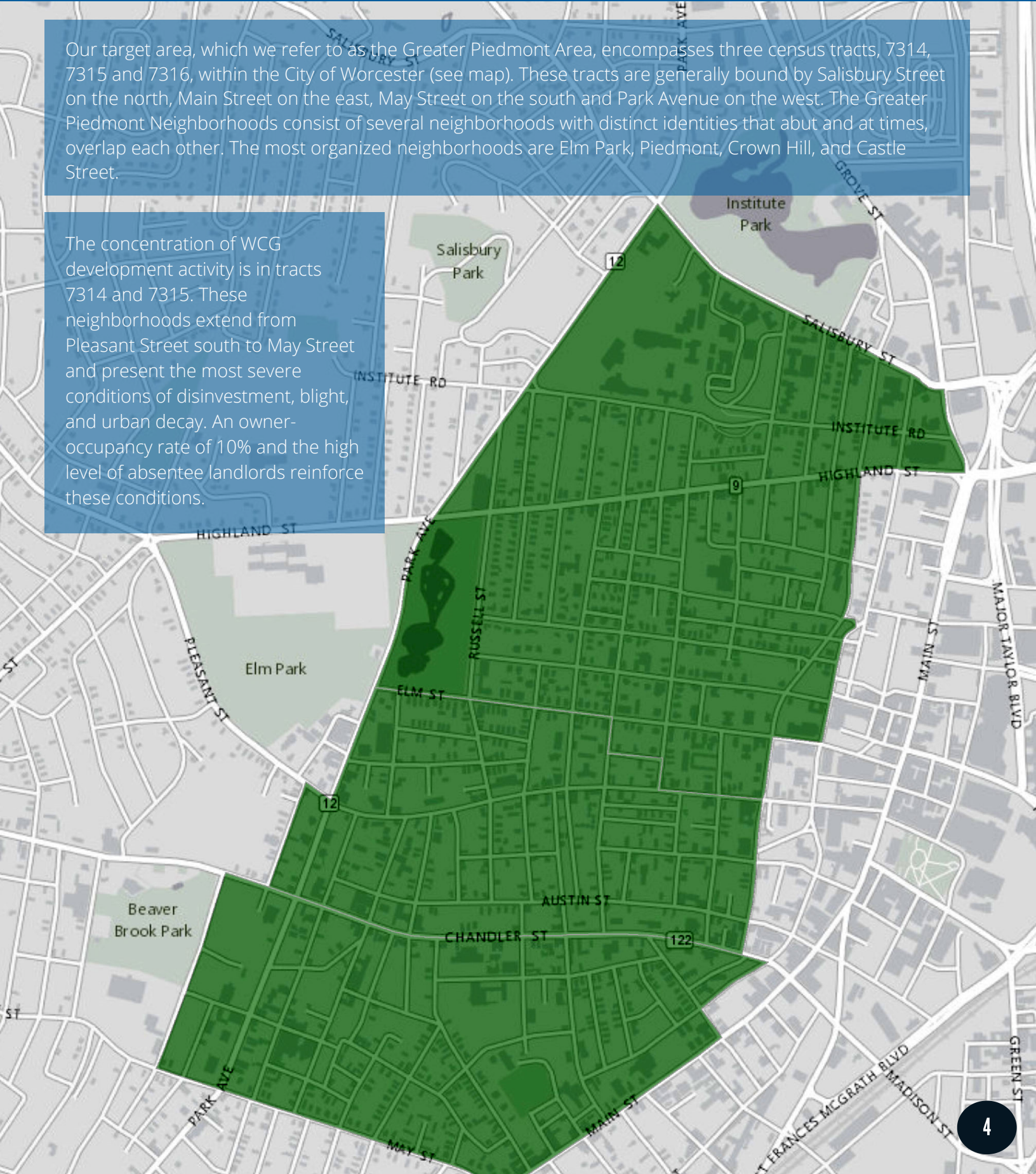
Board of Directors

18

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.



Affordable housing and the emergence of land trust housing.

In the early 1960s the United States embarked on, at the time, an ambitious war on poverty. One part of that “war” was the creation of privately developed, publicly subsidized affordable housing, mostly within the rental market. Private developers were given tax credits for their development of large rental properties that had a certain percentage of affordable housing units for households that met certain income restrictions. Those affordable units were required to meet affordability restrictions for a specified amount of time, often 20 years, at which point those affordable units would re-enter the open market allowing developers to charge whatever rent the market would sustain.

To this day cities have relied primarily on this form of affordable housing development, referred to as “expiring use affordable housing”, to provide some level of affordable housing in their communities. As could be predicted, when the 1980's came, a large percentage of affordable housing disappeared off the market and the country was hit with a major affordable housing crisis.

In response to this crisis, and the support of the Institute for Community Economics (ICE), Worcester Common Ground was founded to embark on a new model of affordable housing called community land trust housing. This model was also employed in other parts of the country including Boston at the Dudley St. Initiative, Burlington Vermont, and numerous other areas around the country.

In short, the land trust movement separates the land from the building with a municipality or community organization maintaining ownership of the land. The land-owner attaches resale and use restrictions to the land, and therefore ensuring that the use of the buildings meets community needs for as long as the organization species.

In Common Ground's case, because of the land lease deed restrictions, our homeownership properties will remain Owner Occupied by first time homeowners and affordable to households at 30-80% of median income for 198 years. This allows the organization, and the city who funds many of our projects, to expand and build on the stock of affordable housing, instead of continually struggling to replace expiring use affordable housing.

As is the case with any new attempt to address an age-old problem there comes a time when it is important to look at what the new solution is really accomplishing. As Worcester Common Ground approaches the end of our 4th decade, we are currently evaluating our land trust housing model to see what it is accomplishing, and what problems have surfaced over time. Stay tuned to the results of that process.

126 CHANDLER STREET

Construction of 126 Chandler Street began in April 2020, right on schedule. Crews took extra precautions on-site to maintain social distance and practice other necessary health and safety measures. With a 16-month projected construction timeline, we anticipate completing this project by July 2021 and look forward to welcoming new tenants soon thereafter.

In addition to the 31 affordable rental units, 126 Chandler Street will have a large, street-level community room equipped with a full kitchen and be home to Horizon Acupuncture, our long-time commercial tenant presently located across the street at 133 Chandler Street.

SPRING

SUMMER

FALL



20 Merrick: New Homeowner



This summer, we officially welcomed first-time homebuyer Annabella and her family to their brand new home at 20 Merrick Street. Worcester Common Ground works to create opportunities for income-qualified households to access homeownership, which is a key tool in building personal wealth and contributing to neighborhood stability. As Worcester's real estate market heats up, the dream of homeownership for many people is slipping out of reach. We are thrilled to welcome Anabella to the Worcester Common Ground family and Piedmont neighborhood; we look forward to seeing 24 Merrick, next door, be the perfect complement as another first-time homebuyer project.

Part Two: 24 Merrick Street

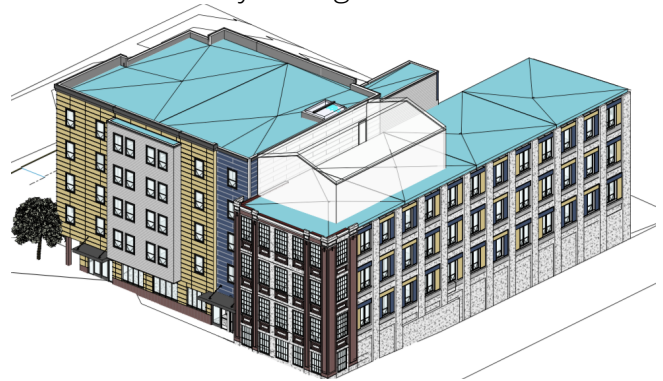
We were finally able to begin construction of 24 Merrick this summer, when it was safe for Youthbuild students to return in-person. Based on feedback from potential buyers, the design of 24 Merrick will change slightly by replacing the side deck with a third bedroom, allowing for more space inside the home. Thank you to our continued partners: Youthbuild Worcester, Saint-Gobain and CertainTEED, Charlesbank Homes, Berkshire Bank, People's United Foundation, Stoddard Charitable Trust, Fletcher Foundation, American Campus Communities, and Kuehn Charitable Foundation.



SUSTAINABILITY

Rooftop Greenhouse | 126 Chandler

Atop our 31-unit affordable housing complex at 126 Chandler Street, we are planning the installation of a rooftop greenhouse which will replicate many of the same ideas that came to life in our urban bioshelter. It will feature hydroponic growing systems which use water and added nutrients, rather than soil, as the growing medium. It will be accessible to all residents in the building and will be utilized as an educational space for our community at large, which includes a variety of elementary schools, high schools, colleges and universities. We are grateful to the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts for their generous contribution of \$100k through their Activation Fund, as well as Berkshire Bank and Umass Memorial.



Community Solar

In September, Worcester Common Ground signed up for a subscription to a community solar program. The program is a partnership between the Massachusetts SMART (Solar MA Renewable Target) Program and Sea Oak Capital, a private equity firm specializing in renewable energy investment. Being part of the community solar program allows us to access solar energy from a local solar power plant, rather than having to install our own solar panels on our own properties. We receive credits off our National Grid electricity bill for signing up for this program; we end up saving money and using a cleaner energy source, which benefits both us and the planet at the same time!



Bioshelter Solar

We are excited to announce the installation of 8 solar panels on the roof of our bioshelter, the next step toward making this greenhouse-like structure entirely self-sustaining with net-zero energy footprint. Following the solar panels will be insulation, which will enable us to house a variety of floral and vegetative plants inside the bioshelter year-round, creating a holistic, thriving, sustainable ecosystem in this urban oasis.

GREENSPACES

Our **EAT (Educational Agriculture Training) Centers** at 8 Preston St., 9 Castle St., and 7-9 Oread Pl. are officially operating at full capacity, with an array of new and returning growers truly making the most of the spaces. Thanks to the work of our growers, we are seeing bees, butterflies, and birds returning to these urban oases and creating holistic ecosystems in the heart of the City of Worcester.

At **7-9 Jaques Ave**, just across from Chandler Elementary school, our community garden, urban orchard, and bioshelter are flourishing! We have 18 grow beds filled with everything from sunflowers to Thai basil and 19 communal fruit trees which bore apples, pears, peaches and more. We were excited to have all 12 of our growers returning from last season and hope to build new grow beds before the next harvest season so we can sustain this space for our existing growers and welcome even more growers in the future.

We welcomed two new growers at our **22 Newbury Garden** this year and were excited to see their grow beds thriving with not only crops like eggplants, tomatoes and peppers, but also some lovely perennial flowers and decorative additions to our garden space. We are currently in the process of building two communal boxes for mint and raspberry bushes which our neighborhood at large will be able to enjoy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

TRINITY YOUTH BASKETBALL LEAGUE: YEAR 5



The 2020 season of our youth basketball league included an expanded volunteer referee program, with college students from WPI and Clark; a pilot youth referee opportunity for older middle and high school students, many of whom were former league participants; and the addition of a new school team from Chandler Elementary. This program began in 2016 and is a testament to the importance of community partnerships and youth recreation.



C O V I D - 1 9

Meal Delivery with the YMCA

The YMCA of Central Massachusetts' Central Branch facilitated the delivery of over 300,000 meals to families in Worcester starting in March 2020. We were lucky to partner with the Y so that our own tenants were able to receive daily meals for their kids. Strong community partnerships are integral to strong neighborhoods.

Virtual PACT: staying connected while apart

In March 2020, We transitioned our monthly PACT (Pleasant Area Community Team) Meetings to Zoom. This shift allowed community members to stay connected and discuss both COVID-19 related needs and other neighborhood happenings, while evaluating the use of technology as a tool for increased participation.

DISMAS FAMILY FARM CSA

Each year, our partnership with Dismas Family Farm gets better! Thanks to their grant from Project Bread, Worcester Common Ground tenants are able to participate in the CSA, from June to October, at no cost. This year, to protect everyone's health and safety, our Community Organizer delivered each box to the tenants' doorsteps. Tenants also receive weekly recipe ideas and storage tips with their boxes.



Community Spotlight: James Sarpee



James, a lifelong Worcester resident, has been a part of the Worcester Common Ground community since joining the Youthbuild program in 2019. After graduating from Youthbuild, James stayed in touch with staff and was always a friendly face around the neighborhood.

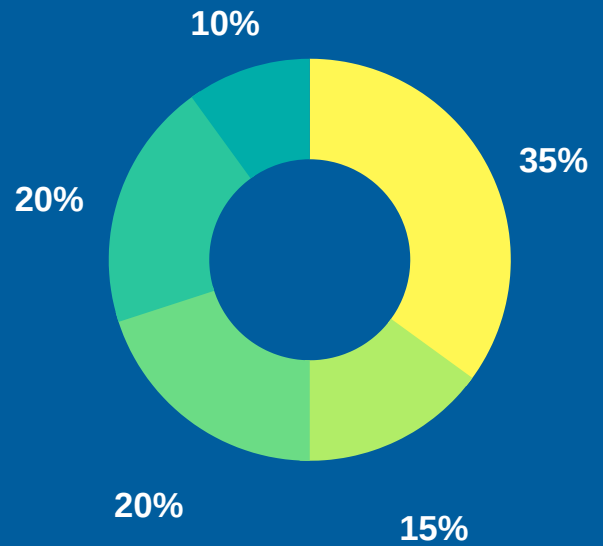
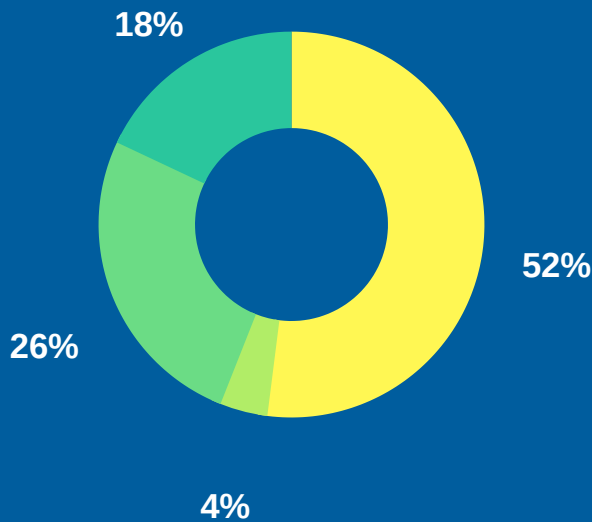
James attended Worcester Public Schools and is in the process of completing his HiSet requirements. He hopes to go to college and eventually become a teacher's assistant for students with learning disabilities. His own educational experiences and learning disabilities are an important part of why he is eager to pursue this path. We are grateful that James has remained a part of our Worcester Common Ground community and look forward to his bright future!



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

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

UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBERS

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.

WORCESTER COMMON GROUND, INC.

CONSOLIDATING STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2019

Changes in net assets without donor restrictions:

Revenues, Supports and Gains:

<i>Rental income</i>	618,765
<i>Program service fees</i>	44,252
<i>Grants and contributions</i>	306,675
<i>Interest and miscellaneous</i>	214,219
<i>Developer & overhead fees</i>	
<i>Total revenues, support and gains without donor restrictions</i>	\$ 1,183,911

Expenses:

<i>Program service Program service Program service</i>	993,675
<i>Management and general</i>	123,163
<i>Subsidiaries expenses</i>	
<i>Total Expenses</i>	\$ 1,116,838
<i>Changes in net assets without donor restrictions (67,073)</i>	
<i>Net assets, beginning of year</i>	7,089,911
<i>Net assets, end of year</i>	\$ 7,156,984

CONSOLIDATING STATEMENT OF FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2019

Personnel and related costs—	
<i>Salary and wages</i>	308,711
<i>Payroll taxes and fringe benefits</i>	73,805
<i>Contracted services</i>	10,260
<i>Total personnel and related costs</i>	\$ 392,776
Occupancy—	
<i>Depreciation and Amortization</i>	164,803
<i>Repairs, maintenance, rent and insurance</i>	221,593
<i>Real estate taxes</i>	83,878
<i>Utilities</i>	65,977
<i>Mortgage interest and other mortgage interest</i>	69,713
<i>Total occupancy</i>	\$605,964
Other—	
<i>Professional fees</i>	34,658
<i>Liability insurance</i>	36,271
<i>Telephone and office</i>	12,047
<i>Miscellaneous, Conventions and conferences</i>	24,358
<i>Bad debts</i>	466
<i>Advertising, Dues and subscriptions</i>	10,318
<i>Total other</i>	\$ 118,098
Total Expenses	\$ 1,116,838

MEET OUR TEAM



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 seven 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.



Jeshenia Luyando
Property Manager

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 property manager and is responsible for keeping 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.



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 on staff.



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. Her past work includes a variety of projects in youth development, policy research, fundraising, and event planning. Ellie holds a B.A. in Political Science from Clark University.



Mikela Nolin
Environmental Specialist

Mikela joined the WCG team in March of 2019 as our Public Space Coordinator, taking on the task of completing our Jaques Avenue bioshelter project and coordinating our community gardens. In June 2020, they joined us full-time, transitioning into the role of Environmental Specialist. They are responsible for determining sustainability plans for all six of our open spaces, working with the Executive director for the planning of our greenhouse at 126 Chandler Street, and assisting in the improvement of WCG's overall energy consumption in our 16 buildings, among other projects. Mikela has a B.A. in Global Environmental Studies and an M.A. in Environmental Science and Policy from Clark University.

NEW STAFF



Tim Gilbert
Project Manager

Tim has been with WCG since August 2020. As the project manager, he is responsible for a variety of real estate development projects, from smaller projects, such as the construction of a single-family home at 24 Merrick Street, to larger mixed-use, multi-unit developments, such as 126 Chandler Street. Tim comes to WCG with a background in urban planning, community development, and affordable housing, having previously worked for the City of Worcester's Planning Division, as well as served two terms as an AmeriCorps volunteer with NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley. Tim has an M.A. in Community Development & Planning and an M.B.A. from Clark University, in addition to a B.S. in Sociology from Worcester State University.

From dollars to development: mission-driven fundraising

Worcester Common Ground's **Community Investment Plan** provides a 3-year view as to how the organization will meet its strategic goals.

- 1 Increase and Improve Community Driven Property Development and Preservation Activities**
- 2 Increase and Improve Community Leadership Capacity**
- 3 Improve Economic Health of Catchment Area Residents and Businesses**

Community Investment Tax Credit (CITC)

One of the primary financial tools used to implement our Community Investment Plan, is the Community Investment Tax Credit (CITC). Created in 2012, the Community Investment Tax Credit is designed to support high-impact, community-led economic development initiatives through a strategic, market-based approach that leverages private contributions and builds strong local partnerships.

Fundraising through the Community Investment Tax Credit Program is critical to Worcester Common Ground's financial success.

In 2019, WCG received an allocation of \$125,000 in CITCs.

CITCs are a *mission-driven, mutually beneficial* way to support community development work. **YOUR** contribution of \$1,000 or more will provide you with a 50% credit on your tax returns. **WE** receive the total donation and have more autonomy over how those dollars are funneled back into our neighborhood.

As outlined above in the Community Investment Plan, your CITC contributions support structural improvements in neighborhood housing stability, personal financial health, wealth generation, and quality of life.

WCG is on track to secure a future allocation of CITCs by the end of FY 2020.

2019 DONORS AND FUNDERS

Individual Gifts & Memberships

- United Bank Foundation - Employee Giving
- Raquel Quinones
- Committee to Re-Elect Harriette Chandler

Corporate Contributions

- Cornerstone Bank
- Office of District Attorney Joseph Early
- First Church in Sterling

Community Investment Tax Credits

- Charlesbank Homes Inc.
- Berkshire Bank Foundation
- Eastern Bank Foundation
- Fletcher Tilton - Stoddard Charitable Trust
- Davis Square Architects
- Sandra Rose and Joseph Bearak
- Curtis Construction Co.
- Santander Bank
- The Wallace Family
- Gloria Hall
- Fletcher Foundation

Grants

- Willow Tree Fund (Fidelity Charitable)
- Workers Credit Union
- Plourde Family Charitable Trust
- Country Bank
- DCU for Kids
- United Bank Foundation Massachusetts Inc.
- Kuehn Charitable Foundation (CEDAC)
- American Campus Communities
- Fallon Community
- Blue Hub Capital
- Greater Worcester Community Foundation

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Board, comprised of 70% neighborhood residents, promotes grassroots community action through leadership opportunities and capacity building. Here is what a few of our Board members have said about their experience:

Why did you join the Worcester Common Ground Board?

I joined the Board because it was a way to know what's happening in the neighborhood and to have an impact on the community and be part of the changes that enhance the neighborhood. *(Arline, WCG Tenant)*

What type of impact do you feel being a WCG Board member has had on the neighborhood/your life?

As community development professor I learn constantly from WCG's work. It offers me an insight into how to make things really happen under hard circumstances. I greatly benefit from understanding such practical matters, which in turn helps me to lead students into careers that contribute to positive change in society. *(Ramon, Piedmont Resident)*

Why should others, particularly tenants and homeowners, consider joining our Board?

If someone is interested in making a difference, fighting for the under served or creating opportunities for families or gaining experience - joining this board can provide that and more. *(Matt, YMCA Staff)*

Growing our board.

Being a part of the Worcester Common Ground Board is a way to meaningfully engage in thoughtful dialogue and action on our community development practices.

If you are interested in exploring an opportunity with our Board of Directors, please contact Yvette Dyson at 508-754-0908 or ydyson@wcg-cdc.com.

Strategic Planning:

Organizations and their boards have a professional imperative to evolve. That includes asking questions like, "how do we ensure our work is truly aligned with neighborhood needs?" and, "Who is at the decision making table and who is not?"

We engaged consultant, Diane Gordon, who has worked with our organization on strategic planning many times before, to facilitate intentional conversations on our board governance and composition, and answer some of these questions.

We are eager to continue evaluating and updating our strategic planning goals.



A strategic planning session via Zoom with staff and board. Pictured from top, left to right: Yvette Dyson (staff), Ellie Gilmore (staff), Diane Gordon (consultant), Ramon Borges-Mendes (board), Jeshenia Luyando (staff), Irene Irungu (board), Arline Rosario (board), Mikela Nolin (staff), Matthew Evans (board), Jono O'Sullivan (board), and Tim Gilbert (staff). Not picture: Rose Simbizi (board).

THANK YOU TO OUR 2019 CORPORATE SPONSORS!



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WORCESTER COMMON GROUND
5 PIEDMONT STREET
WORCESTER, MA 01610
508.754.0908
WWW.WCGCDC.ORG