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WORCESTER COMMON GROUND ANNUAL REPORT 2024



116 Piedmont Street



A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Worcester Common Ground CDC (WCG) has experienced a relatively stable year, with our focus on mentoring the new team members who joined over the past couple of years, ensuring their success as they grow with the organization. Recently, we were awarded \$40 million in funding to reinvest in our rental portfolio, which includes 16 buildings across 10 sites, totaling 73 units. These buildings had not been renovated since the early 2000s and had become a financial strain on our operations over the past three years. We are grateful to be able to infuse new capital into these properties, securing the organization's financial future and, more importantly, enhancing the comfort of the families we serve. The renovations will include energy retrofits for four buildings, exceeding current energy standards, as well as the installation of solar panels to help our residents manage the rising costs of electricity. The project is scheduled to begin in February 2025 and be completed by August 2026.

Since October 2023, WCG has been diligently working on our three-year strategic plan, which is currently in draft form and under board review. With the guidance of our consultant, Dr. Isaac Tesfay, who engaged the community through interviews and virtual meetings, we assembled a strategic planning team of 11 community members alongside our WCG team. We believe we have crafted a plan that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of our community, and we look forward to collaborating with our board of directors to implement it over the next three years. To execute this plan effectively, we recognize the need to build additional capacity and will be focusing on developing our financial and human resource strategies in the coming months. We have also completed an update to our human resources handbook, ensuring it meets the needs of today's workforce. This was a collaborative effort with our consultant, AJ Leto, and the WCG team, and it positions the organization for future success. We are currently revamping our evaluation process, streamlining it for annual reviews to better support our team's growth and development.

In May 2024, we acquired "The Cage" (neighborhood basketball court) from the City of Worcester, a long-neglected community asset located at 124 Piedmont Street. We are currently awaiting responses from various funding sources to begin the restoration of this site, with the aim of transforming it into a valuable resource for our neighborhood's children and extending further growth for TLK Sports who provides free sports programming to our neighborhood youth. The community will be actively involved in the planning process, and we are eager to start the improvements that our neighborhood deserves.

On September 12th, we celebrated the groundbreaking of 116 Piedmont, where we are developing three condominium units for first-time homeownership. This project has been funded through a combination of resources, including the Mass Housing NSP Program, the City of Worcester Affordable Housing Trust Fund, UMass Memorial, and the Episcopal Church of Western MA. These homes, priced between \$200,000 and \$240,000, will be energy-efficient, healthy spaces, and will be available to families earning at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The ground floor unit will be fully handicap accessible, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. As 2024 comes to a close, we are grateful to share our experiences of this year and thank you our community for your support of our work.

Sincerely,



Yvette Dyson
Executive Director



Ramon Borges-Mendez
Board Chair

A Special Thank You



Over the summer, WCG began working with property management consultant Dayanara Negron. She is from Trust Us Property Solutions which she co-created. They are a property management and consulting company who are woman and minority owned. Dayanara has more than 10 years of experience in property management. Along with running her business, she is pursuing a law degree to be able to practice housing law to be a stronger advocate for fair housing and ensuring landlords and tenants know their rights. She is also a native of Worcester and is bilingual in English and Spanish. With WCG, she supported property management by aiding in compliance and restructuring our lease recertification's.

We want to provide a special thank you to Dayanara for her help and we are so grateful for her expertise!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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



Ramon Borges-Mendez
Resident & Board
Chair



Jono O'Sullivan
Resident & Clerk



Janet Frazier
Homeowner



Eddie Jimenez
Treasurer &
Business
Owner



Amie Cox
Homeowner



Mallory Shelly
Homeowner



Sam Smith
Community
Member

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 dyson@wcg-cdc.com.

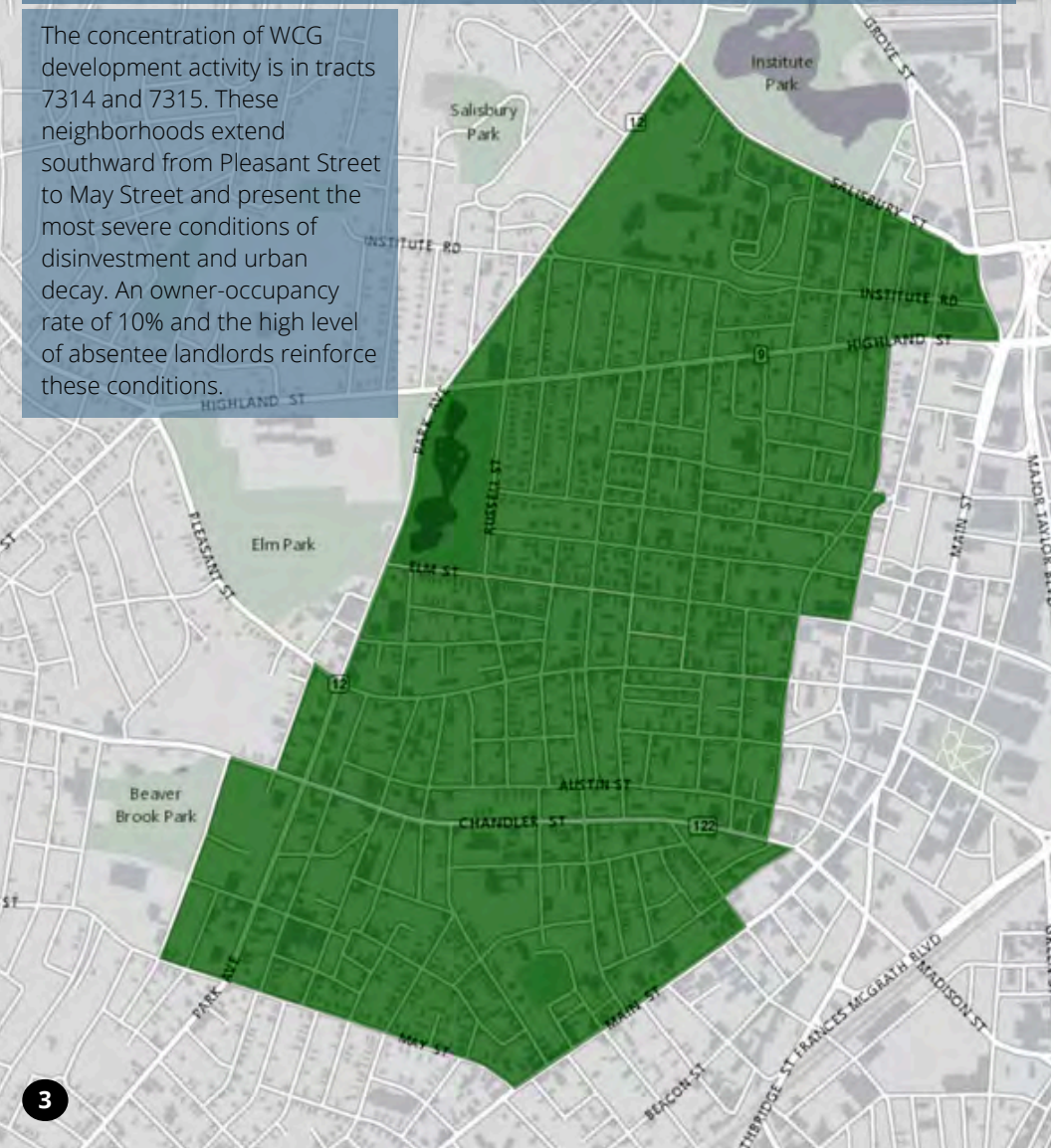
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TARGET AREA

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. 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 Piedmont, Castle Street, Crown Hill, and Elm Park.

The concentration of WCG development activity is in tracts 7314 and 7315. These neighborhoods extend southward from Pleasant Street to May Street and present the most severe conditions of disinvestment and urban decay. An owner-occupancy rate of 10% and the high level of absentee landlords reinforce these conditions.



Giovanni Ayala
Asset Manager

Giovanni joined us in May 2022. He oversees managing each of our properties, including the rehabilitation of our existing properties, and monitoring our vacant lots and greenspaces. He supervises our property and facilities manager, working closely together to ensure all units are operating at their best. He also assists our real estate manager in acquiring new properties and completing first time home ownership opportunities. Giovanni is a local entrepreneur, he started his own business in credit consulting, and has previously worked in banking and sales. He makes a great addition to our team as he grew up in Worcester, in the Piedmont neighborhood, and is bilingual in English and Spanish.



Annessia Jimenez
Community Organizer

Annessia joined us in January 2022. She is responsible for conducting outreach and creating strong relationships with WCG tenants and homeowners as well as residents and the local businesses within the Greater Piedmont area. Her work will also focus on collaborating with residents to generate and implement ideas to improve the neighborhood and identify any challenges to work toward solutions. She has previously volunteered at other nonprofits that similarly focus on helping underserved populations and communities. Her past work also involves advocating for labor rights and safety. Annessia has a B.A. in English from Suffolk University.



Walter Torres
Facilities Manager

Walter joined us in June 2023. He is responsible for the maintenance of WCG apartment units, buildings, and greenspaces to ensure they are operating at their best. He also manages all inspections, as well as move ins, and move outs. Walter has lived in Worcester his whole life and currently resides in Main South. He is bilingual in English and Spanish, making it easier to connect with both residents and vendors. His work experience includes maintenance, HVAC, plumbing, and electrical, with a specialization in horticultural cultivation through maintaining growing systems and climates for plants.



Amanda Dye
Intern

Amanda Dye is a Master's student at Clark University in Public Administration and a recent graduate with a B.A in Global Environmental Studies. She is passionate about making science more accessible and bringing the natural world and sustainability into everyone's lives through art and design. She is working on sustainable projects at our greenspaces, such as mushroom cultivation, vermicomposting, mycoremediation and hosting Community Farm Days & agricultural workshops at the 7 Jaques Ave Bioshelter. In addition to green spaces, she also works closely with our Community Organizer to write grants, plan community meetings and create empowering social programs.

MEET OUR TEAM



Yvette Dyson
Executive Director

Yvette joined us in April of 2001; her work here has been described by our funders as among the best in the state. She handles construction management, project development and everything involved in getting our projects from conception to completion. After graduation from Simmons College, she continued her training as an architect at the Boston Architectural Center and as a licensed construction manager. Her attention to detail and broad understanding of construction and financing has resulted in the outstanding projects we have completed and are planning. Yvette was the Director of Development until becoming Worcester Common Ground's Interim Executive Director in 2012. She was formally appointed Executive Director in July 2013.



Jeshenia Luyando
Resident Services
Coordinator (RSC)

Jeshenia joined us in Spring 2006 and served as our property manager for 16 years. In Fall 2022, she transitioned into the newly developed position of Resident Services Coordinator (RSC). This position will serve as a liaison between our residents and our property management team. She will meet with residents to create service plans that effectively meet their needs as well as developing educational and service programming in tandem with our community organizer. Jeshenia has experience working in social services and as a legal secretary, before becoming an integral part of WCG. Over her 16 years with WCG she has developed strong relationships with each of our tenants making her the perfect person for this newly established position.



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.

What is a CDC?

Community Development Corporations are 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organizations. These organizations work to revitalize neighborhoods, address complex and systemic issues, and strengthen the community through access to affordable housing, community programming, and opportunities for economic development. Worcester Common Ground focuses on the impact that affordable housing can make on rebuilding a community, from traditional rental units to retail spaces, as well as first-time home ownerships. In addition to housing, we preserve and maintain greenspaces for both resident and public use to bring neighbors together, produce healthy food for the community and provide opportunities for agricultural education and business.

DID YOU KNOW?



The first CDC was created in 1969 in Brooklyn NYC. The Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, now known as Restoration, was created in response to Special Impact Program, an amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations was founded in 1982 (42 years), Main South CDC in 1986 (38), and WCG was founded in 1988 (36 years).

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. Predictably, when the 1980s came, a large percentage of affordable housing disappeared from the market and the country was hit with a major affordable housing crisis.

In response to this crisis, and with 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 Street Neighborhood 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 ensures that the use of the buildings meets community needs for as long as the organization species.

Because of the land lease deed restrictions, Worcester Common Ground's 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, which 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 fourth 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 for the results of that process...

From dollars to development: mission-driven fundraising

Worcester Common Ground's **Community Investment Plan** includes these 3 crucial elements as to how the organization will meet its strategic goals.

- ★ **Increase and Improve Community Driven Property Development and Preservation Activities**
- ★ **Increase and Improve Community Leadership Capacity**
- ★ **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 2024, WCG received an allocation of \$100,000 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 state tax returns.

WE receive the total donation and have more autonomy over how those dollars are invested 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.

2023 DONORS & FUNDERS

Individual Gifts & Memberships

- Wyatt & Erika Wade
- Jonathan Wilson
- Kathleen Sheehan on behalf of Vivian Shorteed

Corporate Contributions

- Worcester District Attorney's Office

Community Investment Tax Credits

- United Way
- Eastern Bank
- Davis Square Architects
- Curtis Construction Co.
- Rockland Trust
- Greater Worcester Community Foundation
- Santander
- Warren Leijssius
- Sandra Rose and Joseph Bearak

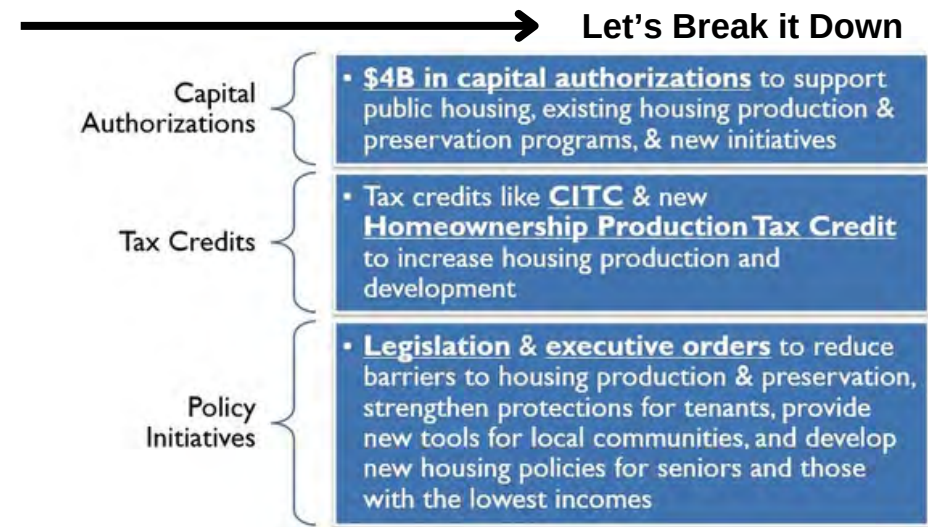
Grants

- Plourde Family Charitable Trust
- UMASS Determination of Need
- MA State Earmark Grant



Affordable Homes Act

The Affordable Homes Act is the largest investment in housing development and sustainability in Massachusetts history. This will target the creation of new homes, first-time home ownerships, improving the existing housing stock, and supporting Community Development Corporations (such as WCG) through new funding opportunities and policies, such as tax credits. This bill will support the creation of more than 40,000 homes that otherwise would not have been built. It will also preserve, rehab, improve, or support more than 27,000 existing units, including improvements to over 7,000 public housing units and the decarbonization of 3,000 public housing units across Massachusetts.



The Importance of Bold Policies

Currently, only 1.6% of properties in MA are available for sale or rent. To keep up with demand, between 2020 and 2030 there will need to be at least 200,000 homes added to achieve growth and a healthy vacancy rate. High housing costs are also preventing economic growth and homeownership for many, as 64% of renters earning less than \$35,000 spend half of their money on rent. For many, homeownership feels out of reach. Additionally, data from 2023 shows that Latinx and Black communities have homeownership rates that are half of White communities. This bill aims to tackle each of these gaps in housing equity and access.

WCG HOMES - Refinancing our Properties

WCG is undertaking a refinance and renovation project of its self-managed portfolio of 16 buildings on 10 sites (73 Units). The project is a mix of 21 one-bedroom, 13 two-bedroom, 33 three-bedroom, and 6 four-bedroom units.

While WCG has worked hard to maintain the buildings in good condition while inhabited and at turnover, many of the units need more substantial renovations in order to keep them habitable and comfortable for our residents. At a minimum, units will undergo renovations in the kitchens and bathrooms. Several buildings will undergo what is called a “deep energy retrofit,” where they will undergo re-siding with additional insulation and air sealing, and conversion of the gas mechanical systems to electric. We are also working on a plan to install solar panels at these buildings.

Undergoing this refinance and renovation will have an immensely beneficial impact on the community, as it will help to maintain affordable housing within the city, as well as support the social, economic, health, and environmental stability. Such work is particularly important at a time where the cost of living, including housing, has risen so sharply.

In January, the project was awarded funding from the Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities, and we are now in the process of closing on the project. We are thrilled to start construction on this large endeavor in early 2025, anticipating that construction will be complete in Fall 2026.



WORCESTER COMMON GROUND, INC.

CONSOLIDATING STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023

Changes in net assets without donor restrictions:

Revenues, Supports & Gains:

<i>Rental income</i>	718,412
<i>Program service fees</i>	44,372
<i>Grants & contributions</i>	258,066
<i>Interest & miscellaneous</i>	434,670
<i>Developer & overhead fees</i>	181,945
<i>Net Assets Released from Restrictions</i>	00,000
<i>Total revenues, support & gains without donor restrictions</i>	\$ 1,637,465

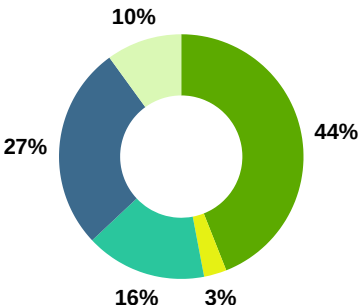
Expenses:

<i>Salary & Wages</i>	459,784
<i>Other Personnel & Related Costs</i>	170,214
<i>Depreciation & Amortization</i>	182,641
<i>Repairs, Maintenance, Rent & Insurance</i>	320,445
<i>Other Occupancy Costs</i>	203,919
<i>Liability Insurance</i>	56,823
<i>Other Office Costs</i>	122,763
<i>Total</i>	\$ 1,516,589

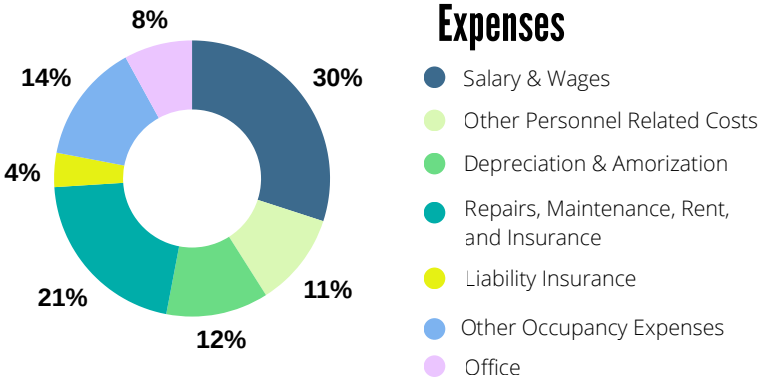
FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Income

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



Expenses



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.

Expanding Homeownership

116 Piedmont Street

Our most recent project located at 116 Piedmont Street will create three affordable condominium units for first-time homebuyers, with a fully-accessible unit on the first floor. The first floor will consist of two bedrooms and one and a half bathrooms, and the other two units will have three bedrooms and one and a half bath. These homes will be all-electric and energy efficient.



We held a groundbreaking ceremony in September to commemorate the start of this project. We want to thank our funders, UMASS Memorial Anchor Mission, Mass Housing, The Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, and the City of Worcester for making this project possible. Thanks also to the project architect Jeanne Allen of JMA Architects, our contractor Landmark Associates, and YouthBuild Worcester. Their investment in first time homeownership is essential to the success of these projects.



Building a Pipeline

While the WCG Homes refinance and renovation project is WCG's primary project, 116 Piedmont Street will undergo construction at the same time. We are anticipating that construction will be complete and there will be three families living in the condos by Summer 2025.

The refinance and renovation of our property at 9 May Street is likely our next big endeavor. As 15 years have passed since its last renovation in 2009, we are planning to update and improve much of the building, including an updated security system and intercom system, a refresh of common areas, and new mechanical equipment.



In Summer 2024, we acquired The "Fatty Jenkins" Cage Basketball Court located at 124 Piedmont Street. We have big plans to renovate the court as it has experienced neglect in the past years. The court needs to be repaved, it needs new fencing, and new hoops. In addition, there will be a mural painted on the court in tribute to Fatty Jenkins and his support of the court. Learn more about this on page 16.

GREENSPACES

Our **Community Gardens** had another extraordinary season this year thanks to our caring resident gardeners and community partners. WCG maintains 7 greenspaces including both tilled and no-till plots, vertical and hydroponic gardens, and raised beds, for growing a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. This year, gardeners grew okra, eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, corn, herbs, and edible flowers amongst the wide variety of produce. Thank you to the City of Worcester and to the Regional Environmental Council for assisting our garden management by delivering free compost, providing our gardeners with a variety of seedlings, and coordinating community garden parties.



At the **Jaques Ave Bioshelter**, our intern Amanda expanded the fungi growing operations which are grown on recycled cardboard, paper products and logs. In 2024, we cultivated various types, including Oyster, Wine Caps, Shiitake, and will be adding Lion's mane in Spring 2025. WCG organized its 2nd annual Community Farm Day in April, with a workshop on creating Shiitake logs, free seeds, seed potatoes distribution and free agricultural resources from MDAR. In 2023, a worm farm was established which not only provides free compost and fertilizer, but also reduces waste and greenhouse gas emissions. This year we offered worm fertilizer products to gardeners for free, which enhances yields, improves soil ecology, aids in water retention, and is 100% organic and sustainable. Amanda's work at the Bioshelter was featured in Clark University's alumni magazine and in the Northeast Organic Farmer's Magazine, *The Natural Farmer*.

WCG DEI POLICY



At WCG, our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is grounded in a thoughtful, intentional approach that has been evolving over the past three years and will continue to develop in the future. We recognize that DEI is not just a policy, but a continuous journey toward creating a more just and equitable environment for everyone we serve.

Commitment to Accountability

Our team is dedicated to holding ourselves and each other accountable for equitable decision-making. This involves actively acknowledging and addressing our biases in every decision we make, ensuring that our actions are fair, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse needs of our community.

Focus Areas

We are committed to focusing on specific areas that directly impact our community:

- **Inclusive Representation:** We will strive to ensure that our team, leadership, and community programs reflect the diversity of the population we serve. We believe that diverse perspectives lead to better outcomes and stronger, more resilient communities.
- **Equitable Access to Services:** We will work tirelessly to provide the services our community needs, with a focus on removing barriers that may prevent equitable access. Our goal is to create pathways to success for all residents, recognizing that success may look different for each individual.
- **Ongoing Education and Training:** We understand that the journey toward equity and inclusion is ongoing. We will invest in continuous education and training for our team to enhance our understanding of DEI principles and to stay informed about best practices in the field.

Empowerment and Community Engagement

We are committed to being present and responsive to the needs and concerns of our residents. We will create safe spaces for our community members to express their thoughts, share their experiences, and voice their concerns. By empowering our residents, we aim to inspire and support meaningful change within the community.

Measuring Success

To ensure that our DEI efforts are effective, we will establish clear metrics and regularly assess our progress. We will use feedback from our community and team members to guide our ongoing efforts, making adjustments as necessary to better serve our community's needs.

A Commitment to Continuous Improvement

DEI is not a destination but a continuous process of growth and improvement. We are committed to learning from our experiences, embracing challenges, and remaining open to new ideas and perspectives. Our ultimate goal is to build a community where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their fullest potential.

DISMAS FAMILY FARM CSA

Dismas Family Farm and WCG have had a long partnership that helps to provide our residents with fresh fruits and vegetables from June to October at no cost. Dismas Family Farm's mission is to help reintegrate previously incarcerated individuals by housing them and teaching them valuable skills on the farm. The residents and staff tend to the farm together to be able to grow delicious fruits and vegetables that we then get to distribute to our community.

This year, we delivered 17 boxes to more than 25 residents, in addition, we provided 2-3 recipes that were specifically curated to the items in the box each week. Thank you to Dismas Family Farm!



Community Spotlight: GAFAR International

This year our community spotlight is on **GAFAR International** which stands for Global Agricultural and Research for Farmland Restoration. Their organization that aims to support the food systems in the local community through sustainable climate smart agriculture and commercial oriented farming system thereby eradicating hunger and poverty through transforming their farming system from hand tools to motorized farm equipment. Their efforts in MA, the U.S., and West Africa are rooted in the belief that sustainable agriculture is the cornerstone of resilient communities. They seek to empower women farmers, recognizing them as vital contributors to the agricultural landscape, by providing access to education, resources, and markets. Simultaneously they collaborate with local farmers to implement practices that not only restore farmlands but also foster economic growth, leading to vibrant, self sufficient communities.

This Summer we collaborated with GAFAR and their gardeners, for them to grow at our Oread Place Garden. They transformed the entire space and put so much love and care into the garden while educating three gardeners about growing. They grew collard greens, tomatoes, hot peppers, okra, eggplant, and more. Their harvest was taken home for their gardener's families, donated to neighbors and food pantries, as well as sold to surrounding churches.



SUSTAINABILITY

Rooftop Greenhouse | 126 Chandler

Atop our 31-unit affordable housing complex at 126 Chandler Street, is a rooftop greenhouse. It features a **hydroponic growing system** which uses water and added nutrients, rather than soil, as the growing medium. This can be a healthier way of growing food as it avoids the use of industrial pesticides, and promotes food production that is 100% organic. Our greenhouse flourished this Summer, particularly the semi-hydroponic **Beto Bucket** system, which combines the use of soil substrate with automated irrigation. We were able to harvest cucumbers, tomatoes, green beans, and herbs every few weeks and provide our tenants with fresh vegetables for their meals. The process allows for year round growing so residents and community members can enjoy fresh vegetables all year long. Tom Haffly from Central Mass, CEA LLC brought his expertise to the site and ensured that each system and mechanism required for climate control was properly installed.



Community Engagement

Earth Day Clean-Up

This past Earth Day during the Regional Environmental Council's Annual Earth Day Clean up, WCG supported the Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network Center in their clean up of the Pleasant Area where volunteers cleaned up the surrounding streets and "The Cage" neighborhood basketball court.



Bancroft School Build Day at the Bioshelter

In April, 7th grade students from the Bancroft School split into two teams and helped us rebuild our 3 -tiered compost bin and create vertical pallet gardens. These improvements have transformed the space, providing free compost to residents and maximizing the growing potential on this urban plot.



Tabling Events

We have been working to expand our community outreach and therefore tabled at several events in the neighborhood throughout the year, such as TLK Sports Trick or Treat Event, National Night Out, Worcester Health and Housing Block Party, and more!



The Cage & TLK Sports

In the Fall of 2024, WCG acquired ownership of **"The Cage" "Fatty" Jenkins Memorial Court**. During the court's lifespan there has been several different owners which has led to some neglect of the court, but The Cage has remained a staple in the Pleasant and Piedmont neighborhood. Residents of all ages love to come to the court and play. In the mid-2000s, the Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network Center revitalized the court and dedicated it to former firefighter Fatty Jenkins, who was dedicated to sports as well as the youth in the Chandler and Pleasant Street neighborhood where he grew up. Fatty ran programming for the kids in the neighborhood up until the end of his life in 2006.



WCG is very excited to have ownership of this property and wants to create a strong community driven vision for the space. In the upcoming years, we plan to revitalize the court by repaving it, adding new fencing, new hoops, and more! This corridor functions as a walkway for pedestrians and a main thruway for drivers and bikers. Kids walking home from school or residents walking from store to store will be able to have another recreational space to play, enjoy the outdoors, and connect with their community. We have also partnered with TLK Sports on this endeavor who will provide programming for the youth in the neighborhood in the space.

TLK Sports is an organization that provides free sports programming to youth between ages of 5-21. Their programming includes different sports, such as basketball, baseball, and more. They provide games and fitness activities to the Pleasant and Piedmont neighborhoods to ensure safe, educational, and quality recreational programming. Within the last four summers, TLK Sports have run a 6-week program at The Cage. Which includes sports instruction and bike safety trainings. In addition, they hold a Trick or Treat Event every year at The Cage to give kids a fun and safe space to get candy!

Tot Lot Renovation

In the Spring, in partnership with Working 4 Worcester, a student run non-profit from Holy Cross, whose goal is to renovate and update recreational spaces for children across Worcester, our Tot Lot Playground received a revamp! Working 4 Worcester works with Consigli Construction who removed all the existing equipment, built the new playground, and installed a new sign. There were more than 100 volunteers who planted flowers, spread woodchips, and painted benches.

We are so thankful to Consigli Construction, Working 4 Worcester, every volunteer, and the Robert J. Stransky Foundation who funded the project!



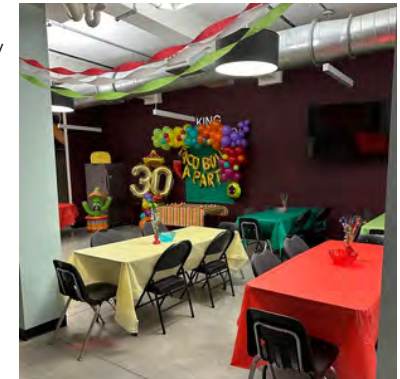
WCG Community Yard Sale's

Throughout the summer and fall, we organized community yard sales at our various building sites, giving our residents the chance to declutter their homes, make some extra money, and strengthen community bonds. They were enjoyable gatherings where tenants could socialize and learn more about each other. Overall, the community yard sales were a great success, bringing people together and creating positive experiences for our residents.



King Community Room

Since its creation in 2022, the King Community Room has become a welcoming space for residents to host birthday parties, baby showers, and holiday celebrations. For local organizations, the space provides an ADA compliant venue for meetings, workshops and classes, bringing community together while also making it an accessible space for everyone to participate in educational events and community-building celebrations.



PACT

In collaboration with the Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network Center, we continue to hold our monthly community meetings as the Pleasant Area Community Team (PACT). These meetings are a crucial way for neighborhood residents to have direct contact with City staff, discuss neighborhood concerns, and to stay informed about community engagement opportunities and trends in crime.

These monthly meetings facilitate important discussions in an accessible community space, allowing residents to feel heard, express their goals and solutions for the neighborhood and connect community members with appropriate and helpful resources.



Trinity Basketball

This Spring we held our yearly Trinity Basketball League! We welcomed students from Chandler Elementary, Woodland Academy, Elm Park, the Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network Center, and we had a new addition with Tatnuck Magnet School. The kids were thrilled to play this season and had so much fun. We ended the season with a coaches vs. players game and a banquet with all the teams and their families to celebrate the season.

We are so grateful to the Trinity Lutheran Church for giving us space to play and providing breakfast! We are also so thankful to the teachers who dedicate their time to coach and all of the volunteers who help make the season possible.



Transformative Development Initiative

The Pleasant Street area was chosen by Mass Development for a Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) grant in 2022. This is a three-year long process that will activate the area through economic development, community initiatives, and small business support. This year marked year two of the program, in this year the TDI partnership was able to hold our second Art Market at Winslow Peace Park, and we awarded four business with sizable grants to give them the opportunity to renovate their facade's. In the Fall, the partnership supported and funded the installation of a sculpture of a maple leaf at Winslow Peace Park, this piece was envisioned and created by a local arts organization Casita Cultural Latina. Also, throughout the month of September we held a food truck series which included several different food trucks, local vendors, and musicians. Year two was quite a success and we are excited to see what comes of the third and final year of TDI!

