



**CORNERSTONE WEST CDC**

# **2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

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CATALYST FOR NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION  
IN WILMINGTON'S WEST SIDE

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Prepared by Gabrielle Lantieri, MPP

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# INTRODUCTION



Cornerstone West CDC was founded in 1999 in partnership with St. Francis Hospital and West End Neighborhood House, concentrating primarily on developing affordable housing. Today, Cornerstone West CDC acts as the implementation organization for the West Side Grows Together Revitalization Coalition. The foundation of this community are the people who live and work in the West Side. Cornerstone plays a key role as a “backbone organization” providing the structure and support to bring people together to achieve collective goals for the West Side. The plan’s approach is grounded in a common vision with community members. Cornerstone implements the vision of a thriving, vibrant, mixed-income community in West Side where people from all walks of life can put down roots and build a life. The revitalization plan is led by the West Side Grows Together Steering Committee, representing a broad range of community stakeholders; West Side residents, civic associations, neighborhood planning councils, institutions, and businesses. The committee is responsible for prioritizing projects, tracking implementation of the revitalization plan, and coordinating our partners. Cornerstone’s primary role as a backbone is to facilitate multifaceted and diverse relationships.

## PROGRAM AREAS



The West Side is a network of neighborhoods and is geographically defined as Pennsylvania Avenue to the north, Jackson Street to the east, Lancaster Avenue to the south, and the CSX railroad tracks to the west. The West Side is made up of The Flats, Little Italy, Hilltop, Cool Springs, and Tilton Park neighborhoods. Each of these communities, while maintaining their own unique character, are the building blocks that make the West Side the unified, diverse, and vibrant neighborhood it is today. The neighborhood continues to serve as a home for people of all income levels and backgrounds.

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Providing the highest quality rental housing to those who need it most is key to promoting a healthy community. For over 20 years, Cornerstone has worked to revitalize the West Side by increasing affordable homeownership opportunities. The housing program has transformed existing homes to serve special needs populations, including youth aging out of foster care, and individuals with mental and/or physical disabilities.

### SMALL BUSINESSES

There are an estimated 300 small businesses located on the West Side, with many of them located on Lincoln Street, Union Street, Fourth Street, and Lancaster Ave. Cornerstone's aims to support and expand our existing businesses through grants and other resources, attract new businesses through entrepreneurship training and increase customers through events and programming.





**PARKS &  
GARDENS**

Cornerstone has worked to build a powerful movement to take back West Side's parks and vacant lots, many of which were underutilized and caused public safety concerns due to lack of maintenance. Cornerstone's work not only aims to create safe, fun and healthy places for residents to visit and play, but also enable residents to see the long lasting and positive impact in their community.



**COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZING**

Many of us who call the West Side home have strong roots here and care deeply about our community. Cornerstone seeks to support people who want to play a role in making positive change in their neighborhood, whether that is their block or beyond. Cornerstone supports events and programs, providing many ways residents can make a difference.



**PUBLIC  
SAFETY**

Reducing crime was cited as the most important action item in the community outreach plan. Cornerstone addresses factors contributing to crime such as vacancy & blight, low educational attainment, and lack of youth opportunities. Cornerstone focuses on building stronger community networks and developing crucial components to creating and maintaining a safe environment.



**CREATIVE  
PLACEMAKING &  
PUBLIC ART**

The West Side is experiencing an infusion of creative driven by local artists. Cornerstone supports our artist community through a variety of projects such as small art installations on electrical boxes, murals, and events such as the West Side Art Loop. These projects inject a fresh sense of life and color into a community increasingly on the rise.

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 & OUR RESPONSE



Over the past year, COVID-19 has greatly impacted Cornerstone’s operations and programmatic efforts. As a community development organization, our work focuses on bringing the community together in a variety of ways. Every year we host small business shopping events, movie nights in our parks, and group gardening activities in our community gardens. Because of the much needed public health measures implemented statewide, our organization worked swiftly and diligently to meet the changing needs of our West Side community. Via multiple private and public partnerships, Cornerstone quickly fundraised and implemented emerging programs such as Heroes & Restaurants, West Side Small Business Emergency Relief Grant, and the Curbside Outdoor Dining Series. Additionally, the West Side Small Business Emergency Relief Grant was used as a model in best practices in small business COVID-19 response, and was replicated citywide with the implementation of the Wilmington Strong Fund.

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In 2020, Cornerstone launched the Life Lines III Development Project. Cornerstone West CDC serves as the developer of Life Lines III and partners with the West End Neighborhood House's Life Lines program for operations & program services. Life Lines provides wraparound services and transitional & permanent supportive housing to youth aging out of foster care. This project will expand Life Lines's housing services ( by adding 10 additional units for low-income homeless youth and former foster care youth -- building the first fully ADA accessible unit for the program.

This project will also increase Life Lines' Housing capacity by 48%, serving a total of 31 youth, and establishing an innovative drop-in community center. The Life Lines III project will repurpose vacant properties on Douglas Street, acquired through the Wilmington Neighborhood Conservancy Land Bank, solidifying prior investments of \$70,000,000 in the adjacent blocks.

- In a local survey conducted by West Side Grows Together, business owners reported on average a 60% decrease in sales revenue since the stay-at-home orders took place in March 2020.
- One small business owner expressed concern that their business is "last in line," not offering food or medical service and not deemed essential.

# SMALL BUSINESSES

Due to the impact of COVID-19, small businesses in Wilmington, DE have been forced to reduce business operations, or temporarily close their business. This slow down of the local economy has impacted the West Side in unprecedented ways. Cornerstone has worked tirelessly to support small business owners as they navigate COVID closures, restrictions, and seek access to additional sources of funding. Like many small business owners adhering to mandatory closures, they are doing what they can to maintain some small revenue, such as offering gift cards or online retailing. In order to address the needs of local small businesses during COVID-19, Cornerstone fundraised over \$10,000 providing 21 West Side businesses with \$500 emergency grants.



# WILMINGTON STRONG FUND

Citywide Emergency Small Business Relief Fund

Several weeks later, Cornerstone partnered with Wilmington Alliance to expand the West Side Emergency Fund citywide into the **Wilmington Strong Fund**. The Wilmington Strong Fund provides \$1000 grants to small business located in Wilmington. Cornerstone is the Project Manager for the Wilmington Strong Fund, has disbursed a total of \$136,000 to Wilmington small businesses. Additionally, Cornerstone was awarded in total \$200,000 from the New Castle County Cares Fund to further respond to community needs during COVID-19. Of those fund, \$18,000 was allocated to the Security Camera and Minor Repairs Grant Program. This grant program provides up to \$1,800 to install exterior security camera systems and make exterior repairs to commercial buildings. Cornerstone also hosted a group of students from the University of Delaware's Blue Hen Leadership Program. These students have lead an extensive research and field observations on commercial vacancies located on major business corridors on the West Side.

- \$1,000 micro-grants were awarded to 136 local small businesses.
- Of those awarded, 65% were minority business owners, 51% were women-owned businesses, and 84% of grant recipients have revenues less than \$200,000.
- 58% of awardees stated receiving this grant allowed them to reduce their business debt, 21% avoided eviction or foreclosure, and 6% were able to hire or rehire staff.
- The majority of grantees used funds to pay their rent or mortgage (42%), paid inventory or supplier bills (28%), or paid utility bills (22%).



The Heroes & Restaurants program provided meals to 2,875 frontline workers by purchasing meals from 26 local restaurants. This generated \$32,158.50 in total revenue to local restaurants,



Additionally, Cornerstone has developed **Heroes & Restaurants**, in partnership with Feeding Front Line Healthcare Givers Fund, The Shone Family, New Castle County, and generous individual donors. This program purchases meals on behalf of frontline workers from local small businesses. The goal of this program is to not only support our independent restaurants, but also provide nourishing & delicious meals to healthcare and essential workers during COVID-19.

In order to shift our work during COVID-19, Cornerstone assisted 9 neighborhood restaurants in expanding their outdoor dining during our event, **Curbside Wilmington**. With support from the City of Wilmington and the Committee of 100, Cornerstone hosted a weekly promotional event, Curbside Wednesdays. Participating restaurants used existing outdoor dining areas to expand their capacity to serve customers safely while featuring exclusive specials like happy hour deals, seasonal dishes, cocktails, live music, and more. This event series safely hosted 350 attendees and 7 Launcher small business graduates,

Our work with small businesses aims to revitalize our commercial corridors and safely encourage residents to support their local economy. We strongly believe we are perfectly positioned in the evolution of our corridors to quickly adapt to evolving needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in order to support our small businesses.



# HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

On the West Side of Wilmington, there is an average of 2 acres of greenspace per 1,000 people, one third the national average. In 2020, West Side Grows aimed to activate and improve the two community gardens and seven parks across the West Side. COVID-19 brought about the closures of many indoor recreational facilities. For many, neighborhood parks, trails, and gardens became strong outlets for individuals to not only maintain their mental and physical health, but also to be together while practicing social distancing. Cornerstone hosted 18 events with a total of 349 attendees during 2020, including a community led effort supported by M&T Bank to host outdoor movies across the parks. Since the pandemic, these **Friends of the Parks** Group meetings have transitioned to a virtual platform which has made meetings more accessible for some. 10 Friends of the Parks meetings were held with 83 community members in attendance. The Friends of Cool Spring and Tilton Parks are in the process of renovating two essential parks throughout the community. These two groups have successfully advocated for resources across City, State, and the private sector to remediate flooding and renovate the playgrounds in these two parks. Cornerstone in partnership with the City of Wilmington and Friends groups, have leveraged \$1.1 million towards the \$1.8 million project. Additionally, in response to a heightened awareness of food insecurity on the West side, Cornerstone partnered with St. Francis Hospital, Bright Spot Farms, and The Village Tree to provide 30 fresh produce shares each week to food insecure families. Cornerstone also engaged West Side community members to create short-term and long-term strategies to address food insecurity in the West Side; such as donating excess produce to local food pantries as a part of Harvest 2020.



In 2020, CSW leveraged over \$1.2 million towards Healthy Neighborhoods programs on the West Side, including garden improvements, park renovations, installing energy efficient lighting, and addressing food insecurity.

8th Annual MLK Day Peace  
March and Community  
Celebration at West End  
Neighborhood House. Over 25  
resources tables, 100 volunteers  
and 300 community leaders  
came out to celebrate the work  
of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr..



## PUBLIC SAFETY

During 2020, Cornerstone West CDC partnered with the Wilmington Police Department and Energize Delaware to create the **Lights-On, Wilmington Strong** Campaign. This campaign aimed to install energy-efficient LED lights on the exterior of homes located in concentrated areas of high crime rates. This provides residents with improved public safety. The program started in the community around Judy Johnson park on the West Side of Wilmington, DE and aimed to install lights on 500 homes. Additionally, this program has the added benefit of saving residents money on their utility bills by installing energy efficient light bulbs. To date, the program has installed LED bulbs at more than 700 housing units. Lights-On Delaware Strong total budget percentage for 2020 was 59.15% and the total amount of installations comes to a total of 1,530 for the year of 2020. The project installation for January 2021 through June 2021 will average 175-200 lights.

Cornerstone West CDC was successfully awarded an additional \$45,000 from the Neighborhood Building Block Fund in order to implement the **4th Street Security Camera Program**. This grant program provided reimbursable grants (up to \$1,800) to small businesses and organizations to install security camera systems. The goal of this program was to increase the safety for customers and also empower business owners to safely operate their businesses. This program installed in total 26 camera systems on, and near the 4th Street corridor on the West Side.



# CREATIVE PLACEMAKING & PUBLIC ART



**2nd & Scott Mural** completed by Nuestras Raíces, 302 Guns Down, & Guerilla Republik

**West 6th Street Bridge Mural** completed during the United Neighbors 2020 event. Located West 6th St Bridge (between Adams & Jackson Streets) across I-95. Featured artists included Vanity Constance, Melissa Benbow, Francesco Iacono, Kameron Rozier, & Alim Smith.



**4th & Rodney "Tot Lot" Mural** completed by Be Ready CDC in honor of Pastor Lottie Lee Davis. Featured artists included Crae Washington of Smashed Label & JaQuanne LeRoy.



*"Loved the involvement with the kids around the community; everything ran so smoothly," mentioned a survey respondent in regards to the United Neighbors event.*

# NUMBERS AT A GLANCE



**\$930,426**

**TOTAL  
REVENUE  
FY 2020**

**\$99,919**

**PROGRAM  
INCOME**

**\$71,265**

**GOVERNMENT  
GRANTS**

**\$732,251**

**CONTRIBUTIONS**

**\$26,990**

**INDIVIDUAL  
CONTRIBUTIONS**

# OUR IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITY

## Social Media & Public Relations

- 2,854 Facebook Page Follows
- 1,649 Instagram Followers
- 308 YPN Newsletter Subscribers
- 1,953 WSGT Newsletter Subscribers
- 253 Small Business Newsletter Subscribers
- 167 Wilmington Strong Awardee Newsletter Subscribers
- 10 Press Releases

## Community Engagement

- 272 volunteers
- Engaged 861 people via events
- Supported 11 leaders in the community

## Parks & Open Space

- Hosted 9 events and 10 meetings with a total of 265 attendees

## West Side Business District

- 26 Security Camera Systems installed
- 10 Pending Security Camera & Minor Repairs Projects
- 26 participating restaurants in Heroes & Restaurants
- Hosted 6 Curbside Wednesdays Events with approximately 350 attendees
- Assisted 9 restaurants with acquiring expanded outdoor dining permits

## 4th Street

- Hosted 7 4th Street Visionaries Meetings with over 40 attendees



## REST IN POWER, REST IN PEACE



In loving memory of Pastor Lottie Lee Davis. Lottie faithfully served as Pastor of Be Ready Jesus Is Coming Church for 16 years. She was employed with the State of Delaware Dept. of Health and Social Services, Division of Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities for 32 years. May her commitment, strength, and resilience continue on in our work.