

House Urban Affairs Blight Hearing

My name is J.P. Marino II and I have been a resident of Tarentum since 2007 and a banker in the area for almost 10yrs now. I am also partial owner of some commercial properties in Harrison Township such as doctor's offices, retail space and a gas station in Creighton with other family members that we all inherited from our family businesses dating back to building of the Heights Plaza in 1955.

Ever since returning to the area in 2007 I have been involved in many community organizations such as Tarentum Area Lions Club, Allegheny Valley Chamber, etc and I am currently involved in the following local organizations:

- Harrison/Tarentum/Brackenridge Comprehensive Plan
- Upper Allegheny Valley Community Development Corporation Advisory Council
- Saint Joseph High School Endowment Board
- Launching "Highlands Alliance" June 24, 2021

Outside our area I am involved in:

- Canonsburg Economic Development Committee Board Member
- President of Bethel Park Chamber
- Southpointe Chamber Board Member

In my banking career I have helped many business start-up in various ways in the local area, either through SBA funding programs or other banking loans while watching other business clients of mine grow over the past 10 years. One of my major focuses has always been working with business clients as a connector and resource to help them grow their businesses and expand their networks.

Over the past 10 years I have seen our area begin the "next generation" of businesses, investors and residents work to revitalize our area. As a banker, resident and property owner I have been able to experience all of the groups, organizations and individuals in our communities coming together with ideas on how to make our area a better place to live and do business. I have seen many residential and commercial properties get renovated into spectacular structures over the past few years and watching the investment in our area continue to increase. The state funding that has come through the area to assist in new municipal projects, businesses and non-profits has proven to be something that has energized many locals, including myself, to want to stay, grow and invest both money and time with this community. There have been 2 really successful cases in Tarentum that stand out to me. There is the Murphy Building, which everyone toured earlier this year, and there was the below project with our park:

Tarentum Riverview Memorial Park 2018 Keystone Communities Grant \$191,000 – bleacher repairs, Children's Playground equipment, and repairs, Amphitheater improvements, Pavilion by Spray Park

Dreshar Stadium Project Phase I 2017 GEDF Grant \$50,000 - Backstops, Chain link fence, Concession Stand window roll up doors and steel doors and player benches

Dreshar Stadium Project Phase II 2018 Keystone Communities Grant \$50,000 - Bleacher masonry improvements, New walkways and paving repair and Block wall repair behind bleachers. ATI volunteers were called "A Day of Caring" United Way Painted the Dreshar Stadium wall as a community project.

This project really helped something so important in our community get cleaned up. It is very expensive to keep parks and recreation clean and up to date, so to have the community get something like this done was a big win. These projects were something that has had a positive impact on so many residents, business and organizations in our community. It is so important that the children, families and residents have a nice park and recreation area that they can be proud of, a place where they can go to enjoy as a

family, play organized sports and gather for local events. To me, this was a great success story to share because had these funds not come through, we would be 3 or 4 more years into deterioration of such an important piece of property that affects the entire community in some aspect and is a focal point for Tarentum.

In order to continue down this successful path, many people in the community have been getting more and more involved over the past few years. They see how properties can be purchased at an affordable price and renovated into a place for them to live and grow or to finally be able start that dream business that they always wanted. We have barbers, corner stores, gyms, restaurants and much more that have started small and have now grown their business to a new level over the past few years. These places are now becoming the focal point for businesses and services as well as the quality of life coming to Tarentum.

In order to keep the energy and momentum, I feel that it is important to increase the communication of resources that are available for these types of programs and funding. There are so many things going on right now that it is easy to be left out or miss a deadline on some important initiatives. Something that other communities are doing are establishing Façade Committees that work on getting funding to local businesses to enhance their facades. The façade of every business is so important because it is not just the “packaging” of the business itself, but also represents the “packaging” of our business district and how we do business. We want to not just attract new businesses from outside investment, but more importantly empower those currently in our community to invest in opportunities and projects. We want to attract new household residents while ensuring that we are able to retain our current household base, making people want to stay here long-term. In order to do so we need to start with the basics such as maintaining parks, helping clean up facades, and keeping the streets looking safe and clean. If we can do that then we will be able to stimulate investment, stimulate sales of blighted properties and attract new residents while maintaining the interest of our current ones.

In addition to a façade program, I feel that as residential investors look for opportunities in our communities that are up and coming, it is very important to be able to hold them accountable for maintaining a property to meet a set of standards. It is too often that one or two investment properties are found in a row of houses where they are rentals and the property owner doesn't maintain a clean environment.

It is vital to any community that they are at least provided with a resource to transform abandoned and blighted buildings so that communities can modernize, revitalize, grow and improve the quality of life. There seems to be a lot of opportunity in Western PA right now and like any community, we hope that we are able to utilize the tools and resources to help grow and revitalize our community.