



Open Buffalo  
617 Main Street, Suite 350  
Buffalo, NY 14203

November 16, 2015

Hon. Darius G. Pridgen  
Common Council President  
Ellicott District Common Council Member  
1315 City Hall, Buffalo NY 14202

Dear Council President Pridgen:

Thank you for your leadership in protecting residents of the Fruit Belt from the negative impacts of speculation and gentrification. The Open Buffalo High Road Economic Development Table unites a diverse array of 19 stakeholder groups, representing Fruit Belt residents, business owners, non-profit groups, and other community organizations committed to economic development that puts people and neighborhoods first.

We are writing today with several requests regarding land use planning for the Fruit Belt, and, in particular, the disposition of city-owned lots.

Most importantly, we ask that, prior to any disposition of city-owned lots in the Fruit Belt, there be a community planning process to decide the use of the land in the neighborhood. Similar to participatory budgeting, a facilitated community planning process allows Fruit Belt residents and stakeholders to turn their vision and goals for the neighborhood into concrete plans, criteria, and guidelines that will ultimately decide the future of the neighborhood. A good example of the process we are requesting is the community planning that PUSH Buffalo did for the Green Development Zone, which has won international awards and has led to dramatic increases in private investment while also realizing the residents' goals for sustainable, affordable housing, community gardens and green spaces, and community centers.

Based on work that Fruit Belt residents and stakeholders have already done to identify their priorities, we think that such a community planning process and, ultimately, the disposition of city-owned lots, should reflect the following vision and principles:

- The Fruit Belt remains a mixed-income community with the creation of new, affordable owner-occupied and rental housing that matches with the existing fabric of the neighborhood and gives preference to existing Fruit Belt residents.

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[www.openbuffalo.org](http://www.openbuffalo.org)



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- Neighborhood homeowners, residents, and business owners are:
  - Not forced to relocate because of increased gentrification and resultant property tax increases;
  - Granted first access, coupled with financial assistance, to acquire city-owned lots adjacent to their homes and businesses;
  - Provided improved access to repair programs that support the preservation of existing housing and building stock, specifically for low- to moderate-income homeowners and renters.
- Creative solutions are found to preserve the neighborhood, such as the creation of a land trust, supported in part by local member institutions and developers, that would preserve housing and rental prices for existing residents and business owners.
- New development activity includes adequate off-street parking to avoid further burdening residents.
- Redevelopment of commercial corridors is mixed-used in design, with current Fruit Belt business owners and residents given priority and input on the use of the commercial space as well as access to the sites.
- Existing, designated green spaces are preserved, and new green spaces are created.
- Infrastructure improvements (streets, sidewalks, trees, lighting) are made to improve the health and safety of residents, bike-riders and walkers.
- New community centers are created not only for recreation and programming, but also as a means to provide emergency shelter/warming centers for vulnerable residents in the event of seasonal emergencies.

We are eager to work closely with you in helping to create a truly inclusive and comprehensive community planning process that helps the Fruit Belt realize its great potential. Thank you again for considering these concerns.

Sincerely,

**Aaron Bartley**

Co-Chair, Open Buffalo High Road Economic Development Table  
Executive Director, People United for Sustainable Housing

**Ricardo Herrera**

Co-Chair, Open Buffalo High Road Economic Development Table  
Executive Director, Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers



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**Open Buffalo High Road Economic Development Table Partners:**

Black Chamber of Commerce of WNY

Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood  
Centers

Buffalo Urban League

Coalition for Economic Justice

Communications Workers of America

The Foundry

Fruit Belt Advisory Council

Fruit Belt Coalition

Fruit Belt Homeowner and Tenant Council

Fruit Belt United

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Mulberry Street and Friends Block Club

New York State Nurses Association

Open Buffalo

Orchard Community Initiative

Partnership for the Public Good

People United for Sustainable Housing

Restore Our Community Coalition

1199SEIU Healthcare Workers East