



# Building Firmer Foundations

2022 Update

# Letter from the Executive Director

After establishing our core operations and selling our first properties in 2020, this year we worked to deepen our capacity in communities through collaborative partnerships. While land banks are a powerful tool, we cannot come close to making the impact we want to see when we are acting alone - which is to meet community residents where they are and deliver solutions that address their problems in a meaningful way. Partnerships are essential. Firming our organizational foundations, as well as the physical ones, is paramount to our success.

We spent 2022 expanding TCLB relationships on many fronts. Community engagement became an increased focus, and we are grateful to Lifeline Community Outreach and Bethlehem Baptist Church for opening up their congregations for us to share more about our work and hear community feedback. We also enjoyed attending Community Days in Clairton, McKeesport, Rankin, East Pittsburgh, Turtle Creek, and the Woodland Hills School District.

We piloted new projects with Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh (RTP) and the Millvale Community Development Corporation (MCDC) to turn abandoned houses into new affordable homeownership opportunities. In the Boroughs of Rankin and East Pittsburgh, RTP purchased two TCLB properties and is using the funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh and First Commonwealth Bank to renovate them into beautiful homes for income qualified buyers. MCDC partnered with TCLB on a property in North Ave in Millvale and is undergoing the renovation process currently.

To make partnerships like this, which are scalable and adaptable to different neighborhood contexts, TCLB worked with RTP, City of Bridges Community Land Trust, Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments, and Steel Rivers Council of Governments to participate in a structured planning process, funded by the Forbes Funds, to develop a holistic model for community

revitalization. Our five organizations worked with a consultant throughout the year to develop a framework for stabilizing neighborhoods that includes affordable homeownership, blight remediation, code enforcement, and building preservation. A report detailing this **Equitable Communities Collaborative** will be available in early 2023.

As we remediate blighted properties and preserve abandoned structures, we also have the opportunity to make each house more resilient and energy efficient. With funding from the RK Mellon Foundation, TCLB worked with the Green Building Alliance and RTP to outline the highest yield interventions for sustainable home renovation in a Contractors Playbook. This Playbook details best practices and proven techniques and offers insight on how to prioritize repairs to maximize impact. It will be used to help inform programs that motivate homeowners and TCLB property buyers to include energy efficiency in their home renovation plans.

All of these initiatives culminated in a strategic planning process led by the Center for Community Progress. This plan, funded by PNC Foundation, outlines key goals and initiatives that TCLB will prioritize in the next five years, including expanding our vacant land portfolio and updating our policies and practices to facilitate equitable outcomes. Additionally, a major strategic focus in the next five years will be to complete basic life and safety repairs in more properties, making them accessible to buyers who may not have the resources to do a full gut rehab. Because of this need, we will build a new program called **Reno-Lite** in 2023.

As we move into 2023 and beyond, we are excited to nurture our current relationships and grow new ones to achieve our vision that all Allegheny County communities are places of opportunity, where vacant and abandoned properties are transformed into neighborhood assets.



## OUR PURPOSE

Abandoned properties are pervasive, expensive, and have damaging effects on the economic and social fabric of communities. Unattended property vacancies result in blocks wrought with high maintenance costs, nuisance issues such as crime and fire, and uncollected taxes. This creates a cycle of disinvestment with the ultimate cost paid by existing community residents.

TCLB is dedicated to supporting local communities through responsive, community-centered action that aids in the development of the region. We are driven by a "Plan for the Place" and use data to support strategic decisions. In everything we do, we are responsive to community priorities and development opportunities.

TCLB is committed to providing all of its properties with clear and insurable title, an essential protection that ensures property owners will not be financially responsible for the unpaid debts of previous owners. Clear titles help to support neighborhood stability by preventing unforeseen issues from causing financial hardship that may lead to foreclosure or abandonment in the future.



**Our vision** is that all Allegheny County communities are places of opportunity, where vacant and abandoned properties are transformed into neighborhood assets.



**Our mission** is to equitably transition abandoned properties to beneficial reuse that promotes community stability and resiliency alongside our members, partners, and residents in the communities we serve.



**Neighborhood Restoration**  
"Greening" vacant lots through side lot sales and neighborhood green spaces.



**Neighborhood Preservation**  
Addressing abandoned homes in stable neighborhoods.



**Site Development**  
Assembling and acquiring multiple lots for larger redevelopment plans.



**Economic Redevelopment**  
Acquiring and repurposing commercial spaces to bring in new businesses and strengthen existing commercial districts.

# Our Members

In 2022, TCLB's members included 26 municipalities, eight school districts, and Allegheny County. TCLB is excited to welcome three new members in 2023, Homestead, West Homestead, and Steel Valley School District, who passed legislation in 2022 to join TCLB. In order for us to operate in any community, the municipal government, school district, and county government must join together. Member participation is foundational to the functioning of TCLB. All of our members have representatives who serve on the Municipal and School District Advisory Committees which review property decisions and elect the Board of Directors. Furthermore, TCLB staff work with each community throughout the process to ensure our work is consistent with community goals.

To financially support operations and property transactions, members contribute to TCLB annually. As enabled by the PA Land Bank Act, 50% of property tax revenue is shared the TCLB for five years after we sell a property and it returns to tax paying status. Members also agree to forgive any outstanding municipal liens on TCLB properties. Clear, insurable title is critical to protecting future owners, and thus the stability of communities, after properties are sold to a new owner.

## BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH TCLB INCLUDE:



Increased tax revenue



Improved health for community members



Increased property values



Reduced crime, especially gun-related violence



Savings in code enforcement, police, fire, and public works costs



Revitalized communities, attractive for new residents and growth



### 26 Municipalities

- Blawnox
- Braddock Hills
- Chalfant
- Churchill
- Clairton
- Dravosburg
- East McKeesport
- East Pittsburgh
- Edgewood
- Etna
- Forest Hills
- Glassport
- McKeesport
- Millvale
- Monroeville
- North Braddock
- North Versailles
- Pitcairn
- Port Vue
- Rankin
- Sharpsburg
- South Versailles
- Swissvale
- Turtle Creek
- White Oak
- Wilkins

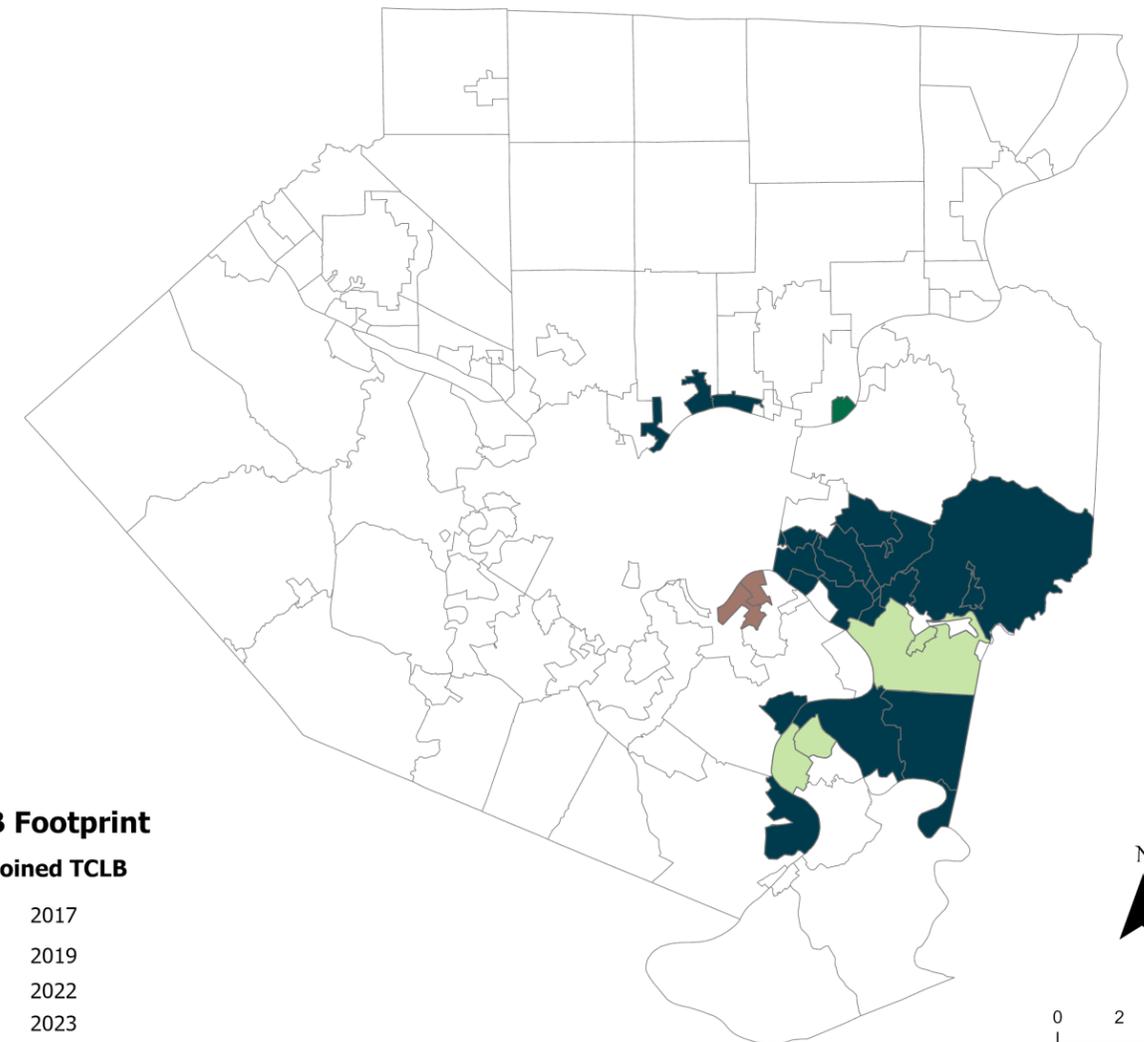


### Eight School Districts

- Clairton City School District
- East Allegheny School District
- Fox Chapel Area School District
- Gateway School District
- McKeesport Area School District
- Shaler Area School District
- South Allegheny School District
- Woodland Hills School District



### Allegheny County



# Local Impact

## INCREASING SALES ACTIVITY

By the end of 2022, TCLB owned 89 properties total and sold 40. Of the 37 residential properties sold since TCLB's inception, 18 (49%) were sold directly to owner occupants or to a developer that pledged to sell to an owner occupant.

A more detailed breakdown of who bought those properties is shown below.

## Buyers of TCLB Sold Properties

40 Total



In 2022 alone, TCLB sold 20 properties, including 19 houses and one commercial property. Of the 19 residential properties sold, 10 (53%) were sold directly to owner occupants or to a developer or nonprofit that pledged to sell to an owner occupant.

## TCLB Property Pipeline:

153 Total



AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2022



### MILESTONE: FIRST COMMERCIAL PROPERTY SOLD

In December of 2022, TCLB sold its first commercial property to a small, local business owner. It was a former dry cleaners that is located in the middle of Downtown Swissvale. The site sat vacant for over a decade and took many years to work through due to its status as a brownfield from the dry cleaning chemicals. Land banks are not currently protected from liability for clean-up of brownfields, though PA Senate Bill 1282, sponsored by Sen. Joe Pittman, hopes to change that. The new owner of this former dry cleaners will take care of the brownfield clean-up, and they will use this main street gem as storage space to grow their HVAC business.



# TCLB Stabilizing Properties Before the Sale

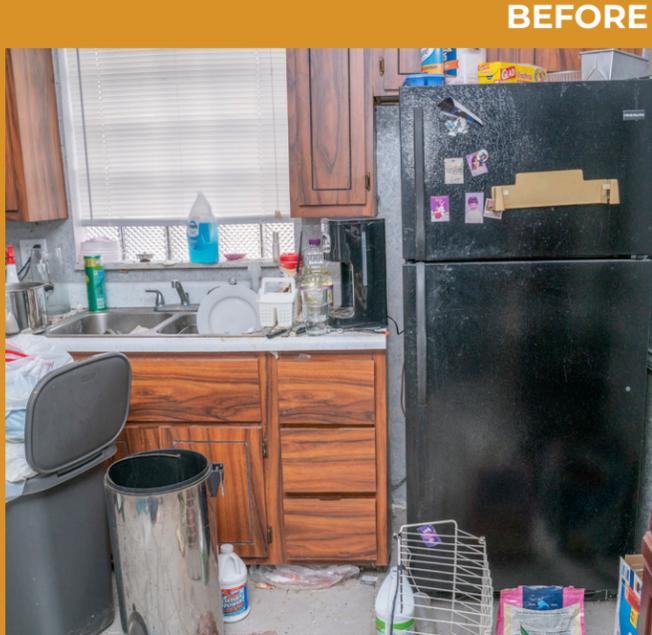
## THE STEPS WE TAKE

From the moment we acquire a property, we visit it, secure it, and continue to monitor it on a regular basis. We quickly move to improve its exterior conditions through grass cutting, brush removal, snow removal, and any other maintenance needed. We clean out trash and debris and address any other urgent needs such as roof replacement or tree removal. These maintenance activities immediately make an impact on surrounding property values and neighborhood safety.

<b>PROPERTY MAINTENANCE</b> <b>\$31,750</b> 61 PROPERTIES; 563 INSTANCES	<b>SEWER REPAIR</b> <b>\$26,723</b> 6 PROPERTIES	<b>SNOW REMOVALS AND SALT APPLICATION</b> <b>\$4,050</b> 29 PROPERTIES; 81 INSTANCES	<b>ROOF REPAIR</b> <b>\$3,865</b> 2 PROPERTIES
<b>DEMOLITIONS</b> <b>\$28,950</b> 1 PROPERTY	<b>HOUSE CLEANOUTS</b> <b>\$27,480</b> 14 PROPERTIES	<b>PROPERTY UTILITIES</b> <b>\$2,360</b> 7 PROPERTIES	<b>GAS LINE INSPECTIONS/ REPAIRS</b> <b>\$1,600</b> 2 PROPERTIES
<b>IN-HOUSE RENO- 519 SUNNYSIDE</b> <b>\$15,707</b>	<b>ELECTRICAL REPAIRS</b> <b>\$4,315</b> 2 PROPERTIES	<b>PROPERTY SURVEYS</b> <b>\$950</b> 3 PROPERTIES	<b>SUPPLIES FOR PROPERTIES</b> <b>\$965</b>

## NEW CHALLENGE: BEE REMOVAL

In a land bank owned property, TCLB staff found a bee hive under the living room floor. Recognizing the importance of bees to local ecosystems, TCLB engaged an apiarist to remove the hive without harming the bees. The apiarist was able to relocate the hive to a place where the bees can continue to live safely, produce honey, and pollinate.



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**“Many community benefits are also achieved by remediating blighted structures. However, even as the region makes progress in addressing blight in the built environment, it risks perpetuating a vicious cycle by conducting demolitions without long-term plans to address the untended vacant lots that remain once buildings come down.”**

**- *Liabilities to Assets: A Comprehensive Strategy for Transforming Vacant Land*  
www.tricoglandbank.org/vacant-land**

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## MILESTONE: VACANT LAND REPORT RELEASED

Abandoned, vacant lots reduce nearby property values, increase the risk of crime, and create health hazards when left unattended. However, they can also offer opportunities to address other neighborhood challenges such as food access, flooding, and air quality. In 2022, TCLB released ***Liabilities to Assets: A Comprehensive Strategy for Transforming Vacant Land***, detailing the impact of abandoned land in its footprint and outlining potential solutions. Benefits of this work include:



**Decreasing crime.**

Multiple studies from cities across the country have found reductions in violent crime and gun violence after blighted vacant lots were remediated.<sup>i</sup> For example, in Youngstown, OH, felony assaults, burglaries, and robberies decreased after previously abandoned lots received greening treatments.<sup>ii</sup>



**Increasing physical and mental health.**

Living near vacant and abandoned properties is associated with increased depression,<sup>iii</sup> higher rates of chronic illness, and stunted mental and physical development in children.<sup>iv</sup>



**Stabilizing real estate markets and protecting homeowner equity.**

On average, across Allegheny County, blighted vacant lots are estimated to decrease surrounding home values by 6.0%,<sup>v</sup> but activities like trash removal, proper grading, and landscaping almost entirely remove the negative impact and can increase property values up to 17%.<sup>vi</sup> Reduced property values hurt both property owners' equity and municipal budgets. If all of the tax delinquent lots in Allegheny County were stabilized, it is estimated that the region would see a total increase of \$457,620,095 in property values, or \$5,145 per house.<sup>vii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Branas, Charles C., et al., 2018, [www.pnas.org/content/115/12/2946](http://www.pnas.org/content/115/12/2946).

<sup>ii</sup> Kondo, Michelle, et al., 2016, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5436723/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5436723/).

<sup>iii</sup> Penn Medicine News, 2018, [www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2018/july/greening-vacant-lots-reduces-feelings-of-depression-in-city-dwellers-penn-study-finds](http://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2018/july/greening-vacant-lots-reduces-feelings-of-depression-in-city-dwellers-penn-study-finds).

<sup>iv</sup> Urban Institute, 2017, [www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89491/2017.04.03\\_urban\\_blight\\_and\\_public\\_health\\_vprn\\_report\\_finalized.pdf](http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89491/2017.04.03_urban_blight_and_public_health_vprn_report_finalized.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Tri-COG Collaborative, 2019, [www.tricoglandbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Effects-of-Vacant-Land.pdf](http://www.tricoglandbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Effects-of-Vacant-Land.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> Wachter, Susan et. al., 2007, *Green Investment Strategies: How They Matter for Urban Neighborhoods*.

<sup>vii</sup> Tri-COG Collaborative, 2019, [www.tricoglandbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Effects-of-Vacant-Land.pdf](http://www.tricoglandbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Effects-of-Vacant-Land.pdf).

This report marks TCLB's commitment to leverage its unique abilities as a land bank to begin to tackle abandoned land at the scale needed to bring meaningful community change that honors resident needs and local aspirations. With the participation of a committed network of regional partners, experts, community groups, and residents, we can transform abandoned and vacant lands into powerful sources of wealth, health, and shared prosperity.

The full report is available at [www.tricoglandbank.org/vacant-land](http://www.tricoglandbank.org/vacant-land).

# Deepening Community Partnerships

TCLB received a grant from the Pittsburgh Foundation to host a series of community engagement meetings throughout its footprint in 2022. It hosted six sessions in all, including four over Zoom and two in person. TCLB held one in person session in partnership with Lifeline Community Outreach in Turtle Creek, and we held the other in partnership with Bethlehem Baptist Church in McKeesport. The goals of these sessions were to introduce local community members to the land bank, explain our application process, and gather feedback about potential uses for vacant land. TCLB also tabled at six Community Days across our footprint throughout the summer and fall.

This year, TCLB also sold its first property to the Millvale Community Development Corporation which they will renovate as an affordable homeownership opportunity. In the same corridor, TCLB and Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh had previously piloted a lead safe demolition project. This year, TCLB continued to test the specification by conducting another pilot in partnership with Women for a Healthy Environment. To evaluate the impact of the lead safety techniques, TCLB measured the level of lead in the soil and air before, during, and after demolition. Techniques included wetting down the surface at the point of demolition and removing parts of the building that test positive for lead by hand.

## EXPANDING INTERNAL CAPACITY

TCLB was excited to host two new interns in 2022 who made a huge difference in its operations and success. Vannie Wang started her internship at TCLB in May 2022 after graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with a Master of Public Administration and a concentration in Social Policy. She continues to work with TCLB to inform project management and program outcomes by collecting and analyzing data to identify strategically useful insights.

In the Summer and Fall 2022, Eve Kopicki also worked at TCLB as a Community Engagement Intern. Eve played a pivotal role in planning community engagement events, managing our presence at local Community Days, and identifying potential partners. Eve's contributions laid the groundwork for TCLB to continue expanding community engagement activities into 2023 and embedding them into a regular component of its operations.



BEFORE

## MILESTONE: REBUILDING TOGETHER PITTSBURGH PILOT PROJECT

In 2022, TCLB transferred two properties in the Boroughs of Rankin and East Pittsburgh to Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh, a local nonprofit organization that performs home rehabilitations and repairs for low-income community members. These properties had been abandoned for many years and were acquired by TCLB in 2021. TCLB cleared the properties of all outstanding liens and debt, then transferred the properties to RTP, who is using funds from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh and First Commonwealth Bank to renovate the homes. The homes are available to income-qualified buyers, with priority given to buyers that are living with special needs.



AFTER

# Moving Into 2023

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

TCLB contracted with the Center for Community Progress (CCP) to facilitate a strategic planning process with its Board of Directors, staff, partners, and other key stakeholders. These conversations will culminate in a five-year plan that will be released in early 2023. This plan will outline the major goals and new initiatives that TCLB seeks to undertake in its next phase of growth, including doing more property renovations in-house, expanding its portfolio of vacant land, updating its policies and practices to emphasize racial equity and justice, expanding community engagement activities, and providing resources and education to state and national organizations advocating on behalf of land banks and other community development groups. CCP will also draw upon its knowledge of and relationships with land banks across the country to highlight best practices and success stories that TCLB will draw from as it builds out new programs.

## NEW APPROACHES TO PROPERTY RENOVATION

In 2022, TCLB worked with the Green Building Alliance and Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh to develop strategies for motivating homeowners to adopt interventions that will increase their home's energy efficiency. The three organizations created a Playbook that describes these interventions in detail, educates contractors on the most effective techniques, and groups updates into "tiers" based on expected impact and cost.

Moving into 2023, TCLB will draw upon this work to inform a new program called **Reno-Lite** that seeks to renovate more properties up to the standard needed to pass an occupancy inspection. TCLB will hire skilled contractors to complete system improvements (building envelope, electrical, plumbing, and heating) and address any code deficiencies. The end product will be a safe home that can be sold to and occupied by a homeowner while they finish more cursory renovations such as adding more modern appliances, new carpets or cabinets. By making these initial repairs, TCLB will be able to dramatically expand the pool of people who are able to purchase one of its properties and create new pathways to homeownership for buyers who may be locked out of the traditional real estate market.

## EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES COLLABORATIVE

In early 2023, TCLB will release the results of a structured planning process with Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh, City of Bridges Community Land Trust, Steel Rivers Council of Governments, and Turtle Creek Council of Governments to develop a scalable model for holistic community stabilization called the **Equitable Communities Collaborative**. The partnership seeks to address neighborhood revitalization from multiple angles, recognizing that many different factors influence community stability, and that no single organization can solve them alone. Through this collaboration, TCLB will act as an "acquisition arm" for City of Bridges and Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh, increasing the pipeline of affordable homes for local residents and preserving the quality and safety of "naturally occurring" affordable housing as well. TCVCOG's code enforcement software, CodeNforce, will provide data to help to inform strategic decisions and support code enforcement efforts to maintain a standard of health and safety throughout the neighborhoods where the ECC works.

For more details about the **Equitable Communities Collaborative**, please visit [www.tricoglandbank.org/resources/](http://www.tricoglandbank.org/resources/).



The photos above are an example of the Equitable Communities Collaborative at work. TCLB acquired this abandoned property, cleaned it out, cleared its title, and transferred it to Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh for renovation into an affordable homeownership opportunity. The renovation included a new roof and siding, wall and attic insulation, rewiring and replumbing, installation of a high efficiency heat pump, new low e-insulating windows, a new kitchen and remodeled bathroom, new flooring throughout the house, French drain in the basement, and a new parking pad and landscaping beds.

## 2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**James Fisher**, Chair  
Shaler Area School District

**David Pasternak**, Vice Chair  
Resident of White Oak Borough

**Elaina Skiba**, Treasurer  
Glassport Borough

**Amanda Settelmaier**, Secretary  
Turtle Creek Valley COG

**Deborah Grass**, Board Member  
Grass Root Solutions

**Tony Kurta**, Board Member  
City of Clairton

**Richard Livingston**, Board Member  
Clairton City School District

**Louis Weyand**, Board Member  
Allegheny County Representative

**Robert Wratcher**, Board Member  
Law Office of Robert J. Wratcher LLC

## 2022 STAFF

**An Lewis**  
Executive Director

**Natalie Boydston**  
Program Director

**Joel Garceau**  
Program Coordinator

**Kayla Geahry**  
Accounts and Office Manager

**Gary Hitchins**  
Property Development Manager

**Emily Woodard**  
Marketing and Community Relations Manager

**Vannie Wang**  
Data Analyst Intern

## 2022 FUNDERS

**The Forbes Funds**

**The Pittsburgh Foundation**

**PNC Foundation**

**Richard King Mellon Foundation**



1705 Maple Street  
Homestead, PA 15120  
[www.tricoglandbank.org](http://www.tricoglandbank.org)

This property is owned by the:



[tricoglandbank.org](http://tricoglandbank.org)

(412) 462-7600