



New Mayor, New Opportunity—for a Pittsburgh That Works for All

On Monday January 3, 2022, mayor Ed Gainey was sworn into office as the 61st mayor of the City of Pittsburgh. Mayor Gainey has the opportunity to address historical inequities and create a city that works for all residents. In his inaugural address, mayor Gainey acknowledged the historical significance of being Pittsburgh’s first Black mayor, and his desire to create a “Pittsburgh for all.” He aspired to make Pittsburgh “...a leader in community and police relations, economic inclusion, affordability, [and] transportation access...”[\[1\]](#)

City Budget and American Rescue Plan Funds. The adoption of the 2022 budget and the multi-year plan for allocating \$335 million in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds are vestiges of the prior mayoral administration. These spending plans require careful reexamination for their consistency with the new mayor’s priorities, including robust community input and ensuring relief funds are targeted to those most impacted by the pandemic. By centering transparency, accountability, racial equity, and community input in budget and policy decisions, the mayor and city council can begin to amend the budget to be more reflective of the needs of all Pittsburgh residents, and address increasing racial and economic disparities. Budget amendments can be made at any point so long as the mayor and city council agree to them—a process exists for operating budget amendments to be approved with only city council approval until February 4, 2022, within five weeks after December 31st. The new administration should work with city council to push for the budget and policy changes that reflect his commitment to reimagining public safety, housing affordability and improved workforce initiatives.

Public Safety. The City of Pittsburgh’s spending on “public safety” is 41% of its budget, and police alone account for 20% of the operating budget. Compared to other medium-sized cities, Pittsburgh ranks high (8th out of 77 in 2019) in the number of police officers per capita even though Pittsburgh ranks in the middle for “violent crime” (47th percentile) compared to other medium-sized cities. If Pittsburgh’s police force was the size of the median police force found in comparable cities (17 uniformed officers per 10,000 residents as opposed to Pittsburgh’s current 33.7 per 10,000 residents) Pittsburgh could reduce the amount of spending on policing and redirect funds to community priorities. Furthermore, mayor Gainey can begin to reimagine public safety by:

- implementing recommendations of the ‘Reimagining Public Safety In Pittsburgh and Allegheny County’ report;
- reassessing staffing needs and expanding the work of the Office of Community Health and Safety;
- adding civilian staff who can respond to matters of public health (so police officers aren’t performing tasks that should be handled by civilian staff and healthcare professionals); and
- improving communications and transparency on police budgeting decisions.

By reimagining public safety and reassessing current practices and budgeting priorities, the new administration can ensure all of Pittsburgh’s residents are safe, secure, and thriving.

Housing. Pittsburgh continues to face a shortage of affordable housing. Over half of our city’s population rent and over half of our renters are cost burdened, paying more than 30% of their income in rent.^[2] The pandemic has further increased inequities as residents have lost jobs and struggle to pay rent. While eviction moratoriums and rental assistance provided some relief, the city and new mayor must take additional steps to create a stable future for renters, and ensure that every Pittsburgher has a place to call home—including Black and brown communities that have been displaced. The city should double the funding to the Housing Opportunity Fund (HOF), permanently fund the Pittsburgh Land Bank, and use 10% of city and county American Rescue Plan funds to produce and preserve affordable housing sufficient to reduce the city’s shortage by 10%. Other housing policies the new mayor should adopt include implementing a city-wide inclusionary zoning ordinance, creating a housing czar position to increase the collaboration of city departments, authorities, and other stakeholders to ensure targeting of funds to the most vulnerable, and championing a pre-filing eviction diversion program that keeps individuals and families out of the eviction ecosystem in the first place.

Workforce Development must be a priority to address pre-existing economic and racial inequity in the city, which has been made worse by the pandemic. The city’s workforce development programs alone cannot solve longstanding labor-market inequalities but deepening the partnership with the city/county workforce development board—Partner4Work—can leverage the city’s power to improve jobs. The city should support Partner4Work’s efforts to strengthen training partnerships in industries that pay well, growing quality union jobs for a diverse workforce including in construction and manufacturing. The city should also seize opportunities to improve low-wage jobs by working with employers who are struggling to attract and retain workers, and face growing costs because of their poor job quality. Partner4Work should expand a new initiative to help businesses willing to improve job quality, enabling more people with barriers to access family sustaining jobs. While seeking to grow and diversify the workforce in good jobs in the city, the new administration should also conduct a disparity study as one step to diversifying business ownership. Such a study would document existing procurement patterns based on race/ethnicity and gender, and provide guidance to departments so that they can increase participation of Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) in city contracting. Technical assistance should also seek to increase the diversity of workers DBEs with good jobs—not simple assume they will hire diverse workers.

Mayoral Action. A city budget that is responsive to our community’s needs should deliver additional funds for affordable housing and redirect funds to address poverty and racial injustice. Mayor Gainey has the opportunity to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and build a stronger Pittsburgh for the future. The mayor’s transition team, its final report in early April, affords the new administration time—with the help of community input—to define more specifically how to implement the recommendations above and accelerate progress towards a Pittsburgh that works for all.

^[1] City of Pittsburgh Press Release, “Ed Gainey Sworn in as 61st Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh”, <https://pittsburghpa.gov/press-releases/press-releases.html?id=5563>

[2] Nthando Thandiwe, Diana Polson, Pittsburgh Budget and Policy Center, *Pivoting to a Moral Pittsburgh Economy: New Mayor, New Opportunities* https://krc-pbpc.org/research_publication/pivoting-to-a-moral-pittsburgh-economy-new-mayor-new-opportunities/