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NPP shows commitment to community improvement

By JOELLEN WANKEL jwankel@bradfordera.com

Apr 24, 2021



This photo shows Congress Place before the revitalization efforts began.

Photo courtesy of the OECD

(Editor's Note: This article is the first in a series highlighting the goals and achievements of the local Neighborhood Partnership Program.)

The Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) has a mission to improve Bradford's neighborhoods. Without the assistance of three local corporations, the efforts would not be nearly as successful.

The NPP's goals are as follows: to improve the quality of life in the chosen areas of revitalization, increase the housing tax base, improve the housing stock, address blight conditions, and finally to improve pedestrian safety and promote inviting and walkable neighborhoods.

American Refining Group, Zippo Manufacturing Co. and Northwest Bank, along with the Downtown Bradford Revitalization Corporation, commit to five-year phases of community revitalization, allowing for a long-term approach to bringing community pride back to aging or blighted neighborhoods.

"It is because of the partners that we are able to get the grant matching funding," said Office of Economic and Community Development Executive Director Shane Oschman.

The combined \$1.5 million contributed from the three private investors has allowed for over \$7 million in matching funds from federal, state and local investment. A minimum contribution of \$50,000 a year, for five years, is required from each partner.

"Northwest Bank has been honored to be part of the NPP Program from the beginning. While serving the banking needs of our footprint, it is also important that Northwest Bank make community investments in the markets we serve," said Julie Marasco, Northwest Region President of Northwest Bank. "Bradford is where we started, and we are very proud that we can contribute funds to better the surrounding areas of the Bradford Historic District."

The existence of the DBRC and the organization's participation in the NPP allows the partners to receive a tax break of 75% of their contribution.

"Without the DBRC, we wouldn't have the ability to make the NPP program work," Oschman said.

Bill Leven, President of the Downtown Bradford Revitalization Corporation, stated, "What we do is incredibly unique and funding sources in Harrisburg have responded to it. We have utilized the gifts from American Refining Group, Northwest Bank and Zippo/Case through the non-profit 501©(3) status of the Downtown Bradford Revitalization Corporation to leverage state and federal funds, leading to the much-needed improvements in the neighborhoods we have revitalized.

"Other projects of the DBRC have included the Mercantile, the Main Street Movie House and the beautiful flowers that have graced the Historic District for years. But our work with the NPP is our pride accomplishment."

The revitalization efforts began in 2006, when Bradford was recognized as an Elm Street community. This opened up funding opportunities through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Economic Development's Elm Street Program.

Over \$7.3 million was utilized to implement various improvements in the "Project Pride Neighborhood" from 2007 to 2015. That neighborhood is located from School Street to Barbour Street and Charlotte Avenue to North Bennett Street.

The Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) is an expansion of the Elm Street Program and was introduced in 2013.

The NPP is in its ninth year of improvements in the Second Ward neighborhood. The program recognizes areas neighboring the Historic District that "need a lot of love" and sets a five-year phase of intended improvements. Once the five-year plan is approved, the specific plans for each year must be carefully budgeted and applied for on an annual basis.

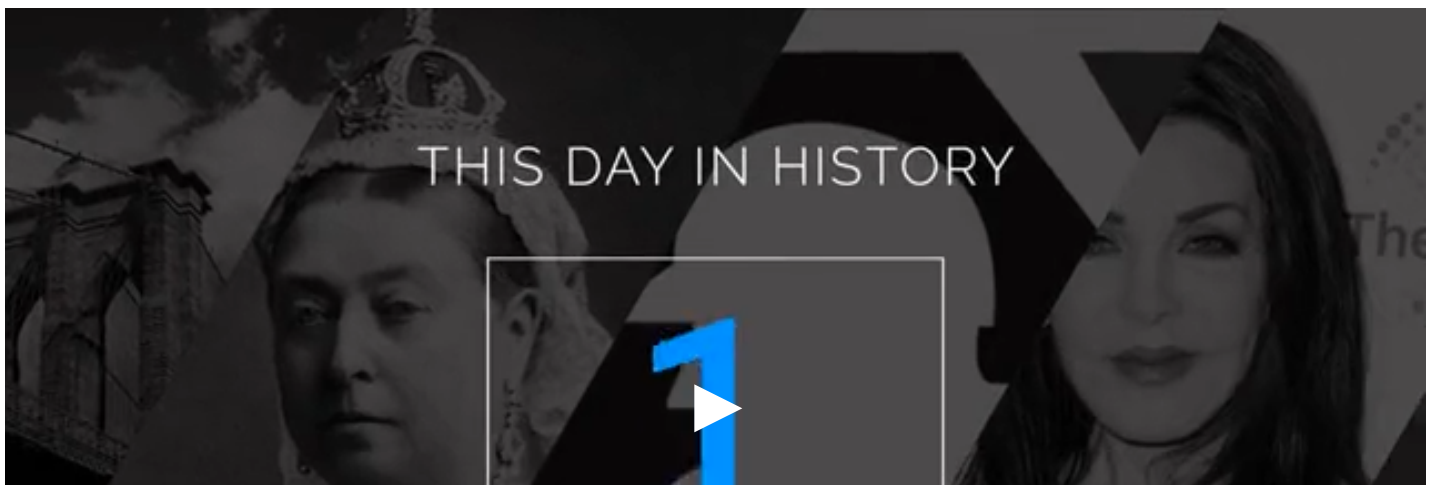
“Each year, we say, ‘What do we need to do?’” Oschman said, noting that the project each year includes elements of rehabilitation, demolition and streetscape improvements. “We make a five-year commitment and each year, identify the items of highest need.”

The annual goals of the project may mean rehabilitation of dilapidated properties, demolition of those beyond the possibility of rehab and attention to streetscape elements, such as lighting and signs, sidewalks and curbing.

“We attempt to salvage what’s there, and if it’s not salvageable, the plan becomes to rebuild,” Oschman explained.

Meanwhile, the streetscape aspect, such as sidewalks, paving and light posts, “fall in when we have the budget to complete them,” Oschman said.

Future articles will provide an in-depth look at the neighborhood improvements and benefits to the residents, as well as an idea of what the future looks like for the NPP.



https://www.bradfordera.com/news/neighborhood-partnership-program-investment-means-safer-neighborhoods/article_c100210b-78ee-5553-95c8-2a73b6c08256.html

Neighborhood Partnership Program investment means safer neighborhoods

By JOELLEN WANKEL jwankel@bradfordera.com

May 1, 2021



The sidewalks on Jefferson Street were in need of repair. As part of the five-year NPP phase, funding was set aside to do ju
Photo courtesy of the OECD

(Editor's Note: This article is the second in a series highlighting the goals and achievements of the local Neighborhood Partnership Program.)

The Neighborhood Partnership Program is in its ninth year of investment in the Second Ward neighborhood of Bradford. The combined efforts of local businesses, namely Northwest Bank, Zippo Manufacturing Co. and American Refining Group, and the matching funds from state and federal levels generated through their investments, has meant significant and notable improvements.

“ARG has long been a proud part of, and partner to, the Bradford community,” said ARG President and COO Jon Giberson. “That starts with the generous, philanthropic spirit of our owner Harry Halloran Jr. Harry and our company’s leaders have known from the beginning how important the refinery’s community engagement, development and stewardship would be to the success of our company and the McKean County area overall.”

Giberson continued, “The NPP is doing significant work to improve and maintain the quality of life in Bradford neighborhoods, which is meaningful for residents and the area’s economic stability. It’s important to our current employees as well as our ability to recruit and retain skilled workers and their families in the future.”

There has been over \$2.2 million in streetscape improvements completed to areas of the following streets: Leland, Thompson, Congress, Tibbitts Avenue, Park Street, Congress Place, Elm Street and Jefferson Street.

This includes new sidewalks and curbs, minor drainage improvements, ramps, signage and street lighting.

Funds also are used for acquisition of properties in the neighborhood, which can go one of three ways: improvement for sale, rehabilitation or demolition.

In the Second Ward Neighborhood, NPP funds were used to purchase both the former Second Ward School and the building that currently houses the Bradford Brew Station.


These buildings were purchased and improved to a point where they would draw investor interest. The Second Ward School was then sold to the Bradford YWCA and found to be too costly to maintain, which led to the building's demolition to allow for the construction of a more maintainable building for the YWCA's use.

Meanwhile, the Bradford Brew Station brought jobs and a commercial tax base, while improving the block on which it sits.

A future article will explore the rehabilitation aspect of NPP investment on the residential level.

The final option is demolition.

"We're well aware of the blight properties that we have in Bradford and we know it's important to our community to eliminate some of the blight." Office of Economic and Community Development Executive Director Shane Oschman said. "Although it's never popular for the city or taxpayers to see a loss in revenue, some homes are just not salvageable. So the purpose of our demo program is to clean up the areas that are so blighted that they are beyond repair and hopefully revitalize them the way that we have in this particular block."



With demolition complete, this opens up the space for new home construction. So far, a total of four new homes have been constructed, with two currently under construction to bring that total to six.

The physical improvements to the neighborhood mean it is easier to walk safely, with better sidewalks and lighting for walks during the evenings or even later.

These physical improvements are partnered with another key safety element: the deterrence of crime. Recognizing the importance of safety in a residential neighborhood, the NPP also made an investment that benefited the city as a whole, purchasing CRIMEWATCH software for use by Bradford City Police. Funds also were used to install cameras at intersections located in the neighborhood.

“The CRIMEWATCH software has been well utilized by the police department and the community,” said Bradford City Police Chief Mike Ward. “Cameras have allowed us to catch crimes in action and the technology has allowed additional opportunities for City residents to report concerns. We thank the NPP, the DBRC and the City for it.”

The reasoning behind this investment comes from a well-recognized theory of crime deterrence. Ward explained that theory and the evidence of its success in Bradford.

“In New York City, Rudy Giuliani and Commissioner Bratton heavily invested in the ‘Broken Window’ theory to minimize crime and improve safety. The theory is, if you have a broken window- fix it. Because if you don’t, you will have another broken window,” he said. “Revitalization is key in reducing crime and improving safety. This has been boldly apparent on streets such as Tibbets. The police department had some of the highest incidence of calls on this street prior to the revitalization. Now, we rarely receive calls regarding Tibbets. Safety is the goal, and these projects are truly helping to make Bradford a better community to live, work and play.”

A dark grey banner with a black box on the left containing the text "THIS DAY IN HISTORY" in white. To the right of the text is a faint, light-colored image of a crown or tiara.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

https://www.bradfordera.com/news/npp-help-means-homeowners-can-revitalize-home-exterior/article_80faae03-00e2-5671-80ef-e0094594dfcd.html

FEATURED

NPP help means homeowners can revitalize home exterior

By JOELLEN WANKEL jwankel@bradfordera.com

May 8, 2021



New homes along Elm Street were constructed as part of the NPP five-year investment in the Second Ward neighborhood. Photo courtesy of the OECD

(Editor's Note: This article is the third in a series highlighting the goals and achievements of the local Neighborhood Partnership Program.)

The Neighborhood Partnership Program is facilitating the improvements to the Second Ward, creating a safer and more welcoming neighborhood.

Another facet of the program is to provide an opportunity to homeowners in the area to improve the exterior of their home, addressing issues that not only interfere with curb appeal but also could decrease the value of their home.

“The Façade Improvement Program was designed to encourage property owners to rehabilitate the facades of their homes in order to eliminate blighting conditions as part of our revitalization efforts in the Second Ward Neighborhood,” said Sarah Matzner, Main/Elm Street coordinator.



The program has seen \$509,000 utilized to rehabilitate privately owned homes in the Second Ward neighborhood — and more than half of that is private investment from the homeowners themselves.

The program offers up to \$10,000 in NPP funds to homeowners who are replacing windows, the roof or the porch of their home. Also, this funding can be used to help with remodeling and updating to bring the home up to code. One such example is to remove any lead-based paint within the home.

There are lead-based certified contractors who work regularly with the Office of Economic and Community Development. Those contractors can be contacted to help with homes in the Second Ward.

Funding remains available for homeowners in the Second Ward who are considering some exterior improvements. Contact Matzner via email, s.matzner@bradfordpa.org, for more information on the money available through this program.

The atmosphere of the neighborhoods in the Elm and Congress Street area is notable to locals and visitors alike. It reinforces the goals of the NPP when Zippo Manufacturing Co. joined as an investor.

“Zippo Manufacturing Company, under the leadership of Greg Booth, was enthusiastic to have the opportunity to participate in the Neighborhood Partnership Program when it began in 2013. It was advantageous for the major investors to have a seat at the table to develop the vision and move the plan forward,” stated Mark Paup, president and CEO of Zippo and Case. “I continue to hold the same enthusiasm because change is absolutely necessary to recognize community pride and overall prosperity. Zippo has visitors from around the world who love the uniqueness of our community. The funding OECD has been able to secure through grants because of our commitment to work side-by-side with them has been extremely beneficial. I am proud to continue to work with NPP as further improvements are made to our community.”

Paup additionally remarked, “In 2019, through the help of the Blaisdell Foundation, we funded the engineering study to improve our Main Street. The study was a requirement to apply for the grant money to allow revitalization and beautification of our downtown. The benefits of these investments play an important role in attracting new members and new businesses to Bradford and it is having a positive impact with our employees, our local small businesses, and our community as a whole.”

Hank Curley, who lives on Congress Street and moved to the area while the improvements were in progress, spoke of the appeal of the Second Ward. Curley and his wife moved to the area from Boston when his wife took a job with St. Bonaventure University. They are happy with the area, as they are only a short walk from Main Street and Tops Markets, and they feel welcomed by those living nearby.

“When my wife and I moved here in 2017, they had completed three of the residences, two on Elm, and they went around the corner and did a couple more,” Curley said. “In the four years I have been here, they have built six new homes.

“To be able to get the amount of state dollars to make improvements, and last year doing the entire downtown, including streets and lights, that’s amazing for a small town.”

Curley spoke highly of the city’s Department of Public Works crews, who are quick to address winter conditions and salt the roads. In warmer weather, he said he interacts with neighbors and enjoys the outdoors.

“I think folks in this neighborhood are friendly. I like to sit on the porch, and people say hi when they go by. I think it’s a good place to be,” he said.



The positive focus of the NPP has been a catalyst for an important transition among city departments as well.

Bradford City Councilman Brad Mangel explained, “After I was on Council for a while, former Mayor Tom Riel asked me to represent Council on the Neighborhood Partnership Program Committee. At the first meeting I attended, it became very clear; the business partners’ main concern was blight in the City. If they were willing to invest money in the NPP, the City should do a better job addressing blight.”

Mangel, along with Jeff Andrews, construction and housing rehabilitation supervisor for the OECD; Councilman Rhett Kennedy and other OECD staff, began reaching out to other cities to see what worked in regard to addressing blight.

“With the support of Council and the investment of ARG, Northwest, and Zippo; the task of developing a program to find a solution for blight in the City began. We contacted consultants who specialized in creating blight ordinances and programs,” Mangel said. “This work led to the City adopting the International Property Maintenance Code, updating the Housing Standard Ordinance, and creating the Department of Property Maintenance and Inspection (DPMI).”

These changes, along with the financial investments, helped make the department more successful in efforts to address the city’s blight issues.

“DPMI is making a difference in the City. DPMI works with many City Departments and Agencies. In a work day the Inspectors may work with Police, Fire, DPW, Code Enforcement and Board of Health Officer, Sanitary, and Water Authority. On the County level, they deal with the Housing Authority, CYS, and Office of Aging,” Mangel said. “This would not have been possible without the cooperation between the NPP, City Council, OECD, (Downtown Bradford Revitalization Corporation), and the (Downtown Bradford Business District Authority).”

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https://www.bradfordera.com/news/npp-what-s-to-come/article_143743b5-eef6-5774-91e3-c2c6f0827867.html

NPP: What's to come

By JOELLEN WANKEL jwankel@bradfordera.com

May 15, 2021



Thompson Avenue is one of the streets where improvements are easy to recognize, with safer sidewalks, better lighting and clearly marked crosswalks.

Photo courtesy of the OECD

(Editor's Note: This article is the fourth and final in a series highlighting the goals and achievements of the local Neighborhood Partnership Program.)

The Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) has been hard at work breathing new life into the Second Ward. The years of investment have made a significant difference for the area and improved safety and aesthetics for its residents and anyone who visits. Sara Andrews, former executive director of the Office of Economic and Community Development, explained that the process began with a visual inspection of the neighborhood and a targeted approach to improve areas in need of attention.

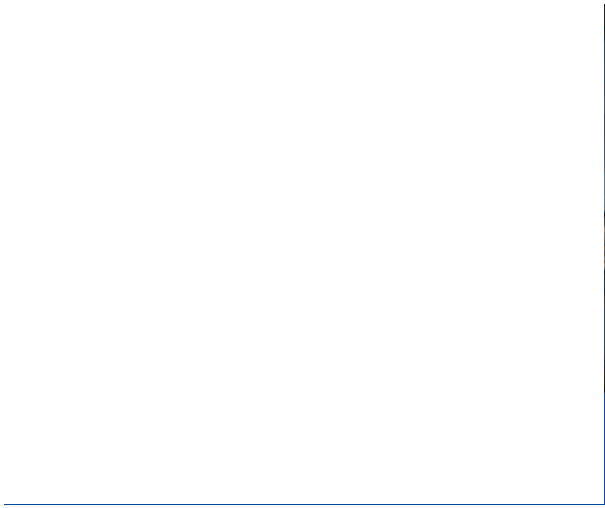


“During our first walk through the Second Ward Neighborhood investment area in 2013 with the NPP private partners and representatives of the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, we quickly identified most of the housing and infrastructure to be in blighted condition. It quickly became apparent that a significant investment would need to be made to address the blighting conditions and reduce criminal activity in the neighborhood,” Andrews said. “A neighborhood revitalization strategy was developed with input from the residents, neighborhood stakeholders, city officials and private partners that provided us with the guidance needed to improve the neighborhood. Neighborhood strategies were prepared utilizing the Elm Street Neighborhood recommended five-point approach to revitalize neighborhoods located in proximity to downtown cores.”

The current efforts have a slightly different approach than the original five-year plan, primarily because of the homes located in the current neighborhood where improvements are focused.

“In the previous neighborhood, the average of rehabilitation costs were significantly lower because the homes on Congress Street are significantly bigger. Those homes have a lot of historical value and preserving them is very important to the fabric of the city,” Oschman said. “We’re investing those bigger dollars, in some cases as high as six figures. We’re not going to be able to do as many homes for the same amount of dollar figures, but they are homes worth saving.”

Work continues in the Second Ward, with particular focus on both outdoor topography issues and building rehabilitation in areas of Congress Street.



One main focus for the project in 2021 is the resolution of an issue with runoff from the upper streets.

“A hot topic we became aware of was a curb deformity on Congress Street, where water running down from South Avenue was flooding basements and sidewalks in the area,” Oschman explained. “It was something we knew the residents were looking for, a way to correct the water issues. So we put that on the list to address.”

Another area of focus is 99-101 Congress Street, on the corner of Congress Place and Congress Street. The building was purchased and is in the process of being remodeled.

“The structure was sound but even the framing within was in terrible shape,” he said. “We’re having to gut it completely to the studs and start all over again.”

This is one of three active rehabilitation projects in the Second Ward.

The investment in the neighborhood has already provided measurable results.

A Net tax increase of 360.43% has occurred due to the six new homes constructed in the neighborhood and the renovation of the commercial building that now houses the Bradford Brew Station. The business created 35 jobs as well, with potential for more when operations are no longer impeded by pandemic-related restrictions.

The program has successfully led to crime reduction, sidewalk improvements and crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety. Meanwhile, the issue of blight, a significant concern in the City of Bradford, has been addressed at a notable rate. New affordable housing has been created in its

place.

Although there are no current plans to complete a new countywide assessment, in the future when one is done, it would be expected that the homes in the neighborhood would assess for much higher values as well.

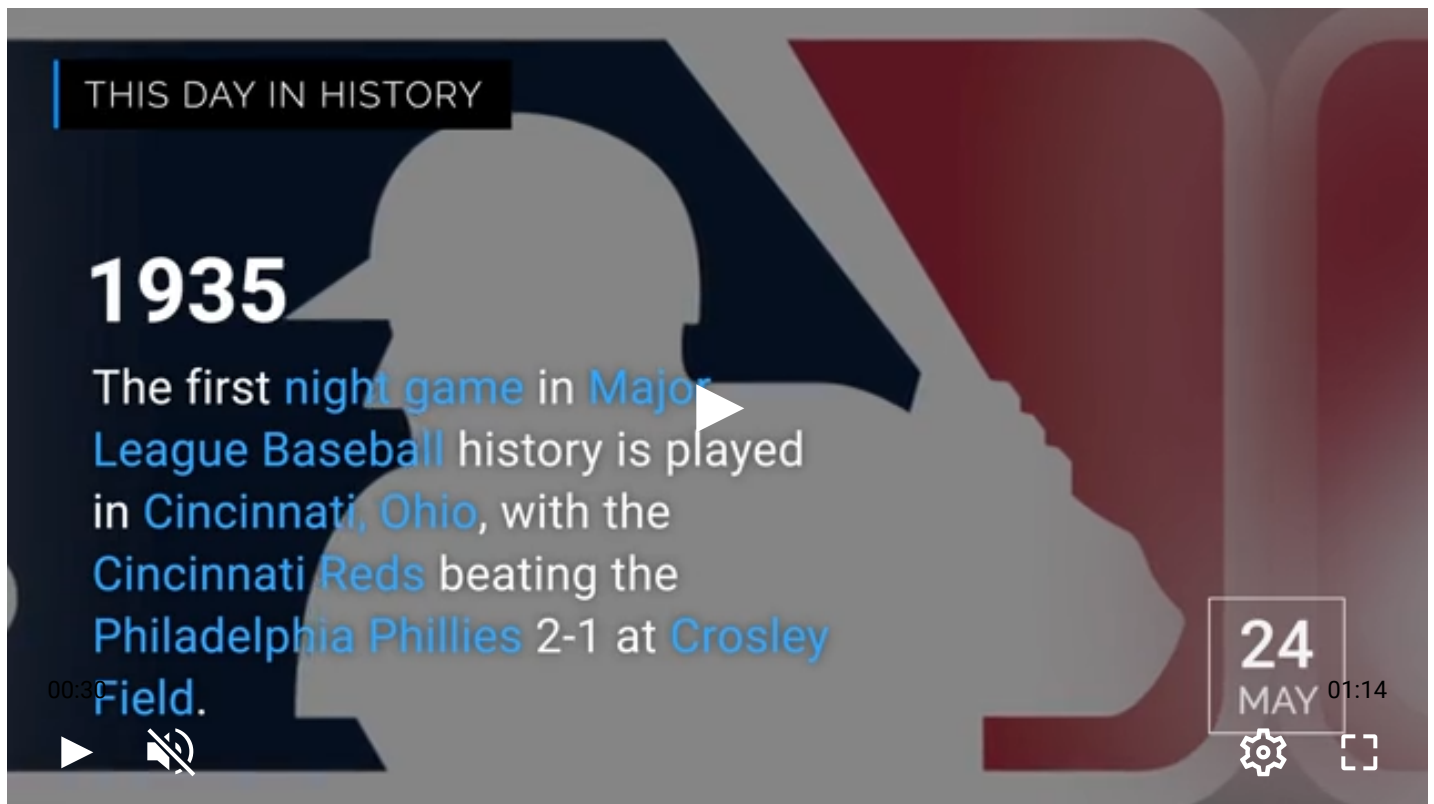
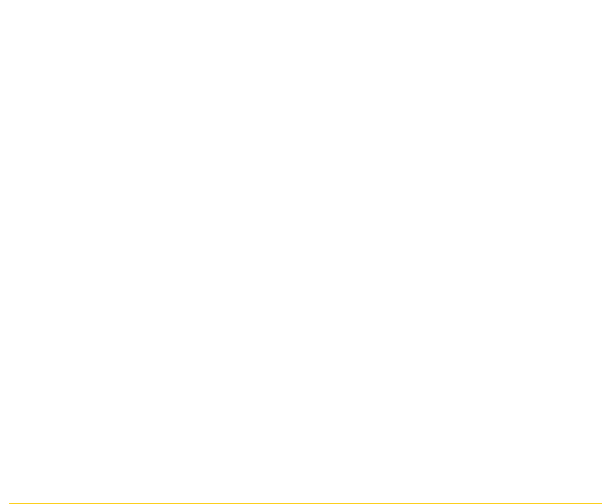
The successful efforts are gaining positive attention from outside the municipality.

“The investment and partnership between the City of Bradford, DBRC and ARG, Northwest Bank and Zippo to revitalize a blighted neighborhood through the Neighborhood Partnership Program has been recognized by the state of Pennsylvania as a role model for other communities,” Andrews said. “The leadership and personal investment made by Julie Marasco, Greg Booth, Jeannine Schoenecker, Mark Paup, Jon Giberson, Bill Leven (DBRC Chairman) and Brad Mangel have made an incredible positive difference and impact on improving the quality of life in the Second Ward Neighborhood. The transformation made in the neighborhood from our initial walk in 2013 to now is remarkable. We look forward to continuing this partnership over the next year in this neighborhood and in other city neighborhoods in the future.”

Meanwhile, the NPP committee will be applying for the fifth year of funding, the final in the current project cycle. In mid-2022, the application for a new five-year stage of improvements will need to be submitted. It is at that time that a new ward would be chosen to be the focus of improvements through the NPP.

NPP is a long-term program that requires a business to make a five-year commitment, with a minimum contribution of \$50,000 per year. The tax credit from this commitment is up to 75%. The \$2.1 million received from the three investment partners (Northwest Bank, Zippo Manufacturing Co.

and American Refining Group) has been leveraged to bring in \$4.8 million in federal, state, local and private investment. This, and the improvements it funds, are only possible because of the support of these investors and the relationship between the city and the DBRC.



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