

An alternative to  
gentrification in Germantown  
& human-scale actions  
for creating it

Development, in theory can be  
good for a community...

Development could lead to more jobs, more activity and  
eyes on the street, more housing options, improved  
street amenities, and more goods and services within  
easy access.

But, when thinking about development,  
we have to ask a very important question:

**Who benefits?**

We find that in many urban areas, a significant outcome of development is gentrification, and the answer to our question, WHO BENEFITS, comes down to

**who has power:**

Economic power (ability to make choices)

Social power (whose influence or needs matter)

Political power (who's making the decisions, who are the decision-makers listening to)

There are many widely varying definitions of “gentrification.” We like this one from CORAJUS because of its systems perspective and room for forward-motion:

Gentrification is a term used to describe the economic and cultural transition that often occurs when wealthier residents start to move into predominantly lower-income, urban neighborhoods. The shift typically pumps economic investment into the neighborhood, increasing its desirability and prompting increase in home values and rent prices.

While there are positive words associated with gentrification, like *revitalization* or *better schools* or *higher property values*, we have to again ask the question, WHO BENEFITS? We find that it's usually these **negative implications of gentrification** that are felt most by those who have less wealth and power:

Loss of history and culture

Inequality, exploitation

Displacement, higher rent, higher taxes

Powerlessness, exclusion

If we look back at history, we see that communities of color in particular have experienced these impacts for years and years. 400 years ago, African people were first brought to the America as slaves.

The repeated trauma of displacement and uprooted / destabilized communities (remember Urban Renewal?) cannot be overlooked when figuring out how to respond to this issue.

For one, we need to realize that

**THIS IS NOT A NEW BATTLE.**

We're talking about an OLD system  
with a lot of structural racism still  
buried deep and rearing its head.

We also need to realize that **this is not just about housing or development**, and so **if our only responses are attempts to reform existing policies and practices** around housing and development, or to resist / prevent what's happening around us, **we will fall short.**

We will only make things *less bad*, and maybe just for a little while, and maybe the worst of it is just passed off to someone else.

## **So what is the citizens' call to action?**

We'll start with 3 new questions:

How can we shape development to better meet the needs of our community?

How can we have community ownership and control over development for the long-term?

How can we reorganize our lives to be less negatively impacted by what we can't control?

The response here is not a quick fix.  
It's about reweaving the fabric of our  
communities and being active citizens of  
our neighborhoods.

In this booklet, we're focused on actions to be taken at the very local level. These actions are accessible to all types of people, no credentials are required.

We believe these actions can make a difference in each community that takes them on. That starts a movement at the community level.

For a number of communities to take on similar actions is how a large-scale movement occurs.

# Actions

Engage in local development processes as an advocate for development without displacement

Create community ownership and control of property

Be a steward of your neighborhood and organize people around that positive energy

## **Action: Engage in local development processes as an advocate for development without displacement**

- Attend your local RCO (Registered Community Organization) / Neighborhood Association meetings. If you already are, make sure the group is hospitable to renters.
- Join groups and coalitions engaging with developers about their projects. Ensure that the developments are in the interest of the community. Advocate for local hiring, living wage, affordable housing (affordable to local incomes). Ex: Germantown High School
- Learn how resources are being used and what City government is incentivizing: look into tax abatements, TIFs, Opportunity Zones, tax assessments, the Land Bank, and other policies/programs

## Action: Create community ownership and control of property

- Form or join a study group to learn more about alternative means of property ownership
- Organize tenants of your building to propose cooperative ownership of the building
- Get together with people you share values with to start an intentional community or cooperative business that meets local needs
- As a group of individuals or an institution, form a non-profit entity called a Community Land Trust to own and steward property in the interest of providing affordable housing and stability

## **Action: Be a steward of your neighborhood and organize people around that positive energy**

- Organize people on your block, get them out to important meetings
- Establish relationships with your neighbors, sit on your porch, pick up trash, plant a tree, organize a clean up, have a block party
- Take part in groups doing community-based work like Men Who Care of Germantown (with youth, seniors, food security, crime)
- Support existing independent businesses in the neighborhood
- When you're concerned about something your neighbor is doing, seek understanding with them, look out for each other

Other actions are important for helping people out of urgent positions of economic vulnerability and struggle:

**Connect friends and neighbors to resources for assistance, for example ---->**

**Support groups doing advocacy and policy reform on a Philadelphia-wide scale:**

Phila Coalition for Affordable Communities  
[www.phillyaffordablecommunities.org](http://www.phillyaffordablecommunities.org)

Women's Community Revitalization Project  
[www.wcrpphila.org](http://www.wcrpphila.org)

Soil Generation [www.soilgeneration.org](http://www.soilgeneration.org)

Having trouble paying the real estate taxes on the home you live in?

Trying to get legal title/deed to your home?

Having issues paying your water, gas and electric bill?

FREE LEGAL  
HELP IS  
AVAILABLE  
AT THE

HOMEOWNERSHIP,  
TANGLED TITLE  
& UTILITIES  
WORKSHOP



**WEDNESDAY  
JULY 17TH  
11:30AM - 3:30PM**

CROSSROADS WOMEN'S CENTER (NEW LOCATION)  
5011 WAYNE AVE. PHILADELPHIA 19144  
PIZZA AND REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

HOSTED IN PARTNERSHIP BY:

GERMANTOWN RESIDENTS FOR  
ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES TOGETHER

CROSSROADS WOMEN'S CENTER

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

RSVP by July 10 - email:  
GREATGtown@gmail.com

or call Rebecca at CLS:  
(267) 443-2676

Walk-ins are also welcome.

The alternative to gentrification we're trying to create is often called *development without displacement* or *equitable development*.

Bigger than that, and because all of our struggles are interconnected, you might call it a step toward *the beloved community*. As Men Who Care of Germantown might say, it's about "reviving the village."

To learn more about **community ownership, alternative economic models,** and **local development advocacy:**



Germantown Residents for  
Economic Alternatives  
Together (GREAT)  
[www.GREATgtown.org](http://www.GREATgtown.org)  
[www.facebook.com/GREATgtown](https://www.facebook.com/GREATgtown)

**Get  
involved  
with**

To build power as a **representative of a group/organization** for equitable development and community ownership:



Our coalition of  
Germantown-based groups  
and organizations, led by Men  
Who Care of Germantown.  
Send your info to  
[GREATgtown@gmail.com](mailto:GREATgtown@gmail.com)

## Useful data on Germantown

(Keep in mind there will be new census data coming out soon)

From 2000-2014, the black population declined by 5,500 residents and the white population went up by 750

Median income: \$28,000 (most recent census data)

“Affordable” housing costs should be no more than 30% of income. Based on median income here would be \$700/month

45% households are housing-cost burdened (paying more than 30%). That number increased by 20% between 2000-2014.

This slideshow was created by Germantown Residents for Economic Alternatives Together (GREAT), with much inspiration from the Gentrification & Displacement Teach-In led by CORAJUS on April 20, 2019.

The ideas here are not conclusive of all there is to know or to be done. But it's at least a place to start.

Other recommended resources on gentrification and displacement can be found on our website:

[www.GREATgtown.org/resources](http://www.GREATgtown.org/resources)