

Peduto at Chamber: Focus on small neighborhood development

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By Christian Morrow



FEEDBACK—President and CEO Doris Carson Williams listens as Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto takes questions after his PowerBreakfast address to the African American Chamber of Commerce. (Photo by Christian Morrow.)

Given his frenetic [schedule](#) since taking office, it is not surprising that Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto was a hair late for his address at the African American Chamber of Commerce's March PowerBreakfast.

Nonetheless, he still managed to present a plethora of plans to remake the city by “focusing inward” on small neighborhood development. To that end, he said, he has realigned priorities in such a way that now 30 percent of his office is dedicated to the new Bureau of Neighborhood Empowerment.

Peduto said education should be part of these empowerment efforts. He said he wants to make Pittsburgh Public [Schools](#) a top-rated district again. He proposes a “baby promise” to ensure universal pre-kindergarten service as one way to do this, even though the district has 15 schools with pre-k classrooms.

Neighborhood development, of both housing and business districts, are also key. And Peduto said he wants to reallocate resources away from massive neighborhood development initiatives like the one already begun in Larimer, and is re-tasking the city and its authorities to concentrate on renovation of existing housing and [business properties](#).

“The first element of this is housing. We’ll focus on smaller rent-to-own development, and we’re making changes in URA and [Housing Authority](#),” he said. “This way renters can opt to purchase or at least walk away with something in their pockets.”

Peduto also proposes rebuilding the “decimate” business corridors in poor neighborhoods and luring entrepreneurs into the new space.

“The URA gives big money to Walgreens to knock down houses and [build a store](#),” he said. “I want to use that same money to give individuals a chance to realize their dreams and rebuild neighborhoods.”

Peduto’s said his other neighborhood development idea was inspired by the work that House of Manna is doing renovating housing in Homewood. It would involve creating a citywide, tax-free entity that would somehow include the development arms of multiple churches and allow them to “adopt a block” and renovate properties around their churches.

“We’re going to make this a city where you have a say, not some out-of-town developer,” he said.

In terms of minority contracting, Peduto also announced that he has incorporated the Equal [Employment Opportunity](#) Commission into the new bureau and is currently working in concert with Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald to create a single Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprise certification form that would enable Black-owned businesses to bid on any project let by any city or county office or authority.

“The office will also proactively search out minority firms to bid on projects,” he said.

Peduto also announced another change in the structure of city government that is notable against the backdrop of Pittsburgh police being tried for using excessive force against Jordan Miles.

“I’ve appointed Deborah Walker, former chair of the Citizen Police Review Board and the new head of the Office of Municipal Investigation,” he said. “And I have moved it out of the Bureau of Police and into the Law Department. We can now have independent investigation of police misconduct charges.”

Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams thanked Peduto for his remarks, noting he has “no shortage of ideas” and it’s the chamber’s job to help implement them. She also welcomed new members and highlighted upcoming events.