

International City of Peace

North Hill

A Neighborhood of Akron, Ohio

United States



**Proposal developed by
North Akron Community Development Corpora-
tion (NACDC)**

One Community Many Cultures

North Akron Community Development Corporation (NACDC)

History. The North Akron Community Development Corporation (NACDC) was granted nonprofit 501(c)(3) status in 2017. A volunteer board of directors governs the organization and provides strategic direction and oversight. Headquarters is located at 760 Elma Street in Akron, Ohio.

The NACDC's geography is predominantly the North Hill Neighborhood of Akron, a neighborhood that enjoys a reputation as one of Northeast Ohio's - and the country's - most culturally diverse communities. North Hill has not only endured over the past 100 years, it has thrived, despite long-term regional economic trends that have adversely impacted its social fabric, physical infrastructure and economy. A complex tapestry of racial and socioeconomic diversity, it is home for many communities of immigrants, and for others, it has been called home for generations. With over 20,000 residents, it is at its core a community of inclusivity, providing a safe and welcoming anchor for those emigrating, and a secure foundation for those whose histories began in North Hill. It is this coming together of neighbors that has created the rich cultural traditions that continue to be celebrated in this community. As a result, the NACDC and the residents of North Hill are in a strong position to continue to drive social equity and economic growth. The NACDC - as a collaborative partner and catalyst - aims to do this through coalition building, economic development, direct community engagement and support, and creative placemaking, assuring a vibrant and thriving North Hill community that inspires, connects, propels, and celebrates its residents and its unique diversity for generations to come.

Timeline

2017 – NACDC was founded. Exchange House opens as cultural hub and international hostel from a Knight Cities Challenge grant. Over 200 happenings directed and hosted by NACDC with the multicultural community.

2018 – NACDC builds out People's Park (FKA the Backyard) with temporary market stalls, stage, and picnic seating to use as a public space for meetings, festivals, picnics, multilingual meals, and concerts.

2019 – NACDC starts renovations on a second house next to Exchange House to create a women's empowerment and makerspace. Programming continues with happenings increasing every year that demonstrate the cultural and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood.

2020 – NoHi Pop-up opens with over \$100,000 in net sales from August to December, returning \$40,000 back to culinary art entrepreneurs during the pandemic. NoTique Retail opens with 20 minority- and female- vendors, makers, and artists selling their products. Even with the global pandemic, NACDC created a prototype for economic development in the Temple Square business district by offering a pipeline for entrepreneurs with mitigated risk.

MISSION

The mission of North Akron Community Development Corporation is to assure a vibrant thriving North Akron community that inspires and connects its residents while celebrating its unique diversity. Activities Include: -Economic Development -Creative Placemaking -Building Social Cohesion

VISION

NACDC seeks to be a nationally recognized community development corporation making connections that strengthen the power of community members and communities.

VALUES

NACDC collaborates on welcoming, sometimes unexpected experiences valuing North Hill's community members and communities through active listening, demonstrating respect, building relationships, learning from experiences, co-creating, and pursuing racial and economic equity.

Vision, Mission and Goals for North Hill City of Peace

- To establish a **culture of peace** in the community as an example to encourage other neighborhoods and the entire city of Akron to become an International City of Peace.
- To sponsor or partner to annually produce an **International Day of Peace** ceremony on September 21 or adjacent to that date. Efforts would be made to include a wide range of the community in this event.
- Develop the concept of **TRUE NORTH** as an example to the community. True North stands for the best of oneself. To find or proceed on the correct course or in the right direction. True North refers to what we should do, not what we can do. It is a term used to describe the ideal or state of perfection the community and individuals should be continually striving towards.
- Honor annually a group or individual with **True North Award** to organizations or individuals who have contributed special efforts and demonstrated results to the community
- Foster relations with other International Cities of Peace, thus enhancing the community's **international brand and building relations** with countries that our residents have come from as well as others.
- Partner with Akron Rotary to expand youth relations to **build diplomatic and international skills for area youth** locally and elsewhere with Akron North High School and other schools and organizations. The Rotary is a partner of International Cities of Peace. This could include classes at North, Summer Camps (local and elsewhere, community programs etc.)
- Sponsor or partner with other organization for **CommUNITY Conversation**. Dialog with police, fire, government health officials etc to develop an ongoing conversation to develop trust and understanding. EXAMPLE—residents spend time in drive along with police officer on patrol and then come together at the North Akron Library for a discussion of learning and experiences.
- **Support and expand efforts for beauty** in the neighborhood with cleanup, art, garden projects including peace gardens to build aesthetics as well as improve the environment.
- **To continue to expand North Hill's economic impact** while retaining and expanding recent successes.
- To be problem solvers, strong leaders and innovative thinkers for the betterment of all.

Background and History

Akron is the fifth-largest city in the U.S state of Ohio and is the county seat of Summit County. With a population of about 200,000 it is the 125th most populous US City. The city nears its 200th anniversary in 2025.

North Akron also referred to as North Hill has a proud and rich tradition as Akron's ethnic community for more than 100 years. About 20,000 residents have always shared distinct cultures and traditions from numerous countries over the years. The strong cultural mix is noted at North High School which is one of the most racially/culturally diverse high schools in the state of Ohio.

North Hill has a deep cultural heritage that continues to evolve to meet the needs of all area residents whether immigrant or native-born. This is a thriving and changing neighborhood proudly looking to the future as it grows in economic development, art, recreation and community engagement. Set in a scenic area, the neighborhood sits mainly between the Gorge and Cascade Valley metro parks and state Route 8. It has been an important part of Akron for more than a century

Last century, most of the immigrants and refugees came primarily from Eastern and Western Europe. There is still a stronghold of community clubs themed around Italian, Polish, and more.

Today there are a wide range of residents primarily hailing from Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Central American countries. Akron is designated as one of America's Welcoming Cities and North Hill embraces that spirit as it continues to welcome numerous immigrants and refugees primarily from Asia and Africa.

A variety of stores have particular ethnic brands allowing for a rich mix of foods and products that attract customers from around the greater area.

North Hill bridges neighboring communities both literally and figuratively as the All-American Bridge connects North Hill and downtown Akron. There are also bridges from the nearby Akron expressway and from the city of Cuyahoga Falls that connect North Hill to greater Akron.

Coming from downtown Akron to North Hill across the All-American Bridge, when one enters the neighborhood history meets them at the entrance. History that is not just of local impact, but nationally and internationally as well.

To the left on Main Street is Saint Thomas Hospital. On August 16, 1935, Sister Ignatia Gavin, a Catholic sister in charge of admissions at St. Thomas Hospital, with the help of Dr. Bob Smith one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, admitted the first alcoholic patient under the diagnosis of acute gastritis. This event made St. Thomas Hospital the first hospital in the world to treat alcoholism as a medical condition, and the first religious institution to recognize the rights of alcoholics to receive hospital treatment.

In 2010, Summa Akron City Hospital and St. Thomas Hospitals were awarded nursing's highest honor, Magnet recognition, by American Nurses Credentialing Center. Only six percent of hospitals in the United States are recognized as Magnet hospitals.

To your right on Main Street is Waters Park. Akron's first municipal park gifted to Akron by Samuel Waters in 1937. Waters Park is a "hidden gem" offering spectacular views of Downtown Akron, tennis courts, an historic amphitheater, a shuffleboard club and an active pickle ball program. In a few blocks you will approach Talmadge Ave. Akron has been home to the All-American Soap Box Derby since 1935. North Hill was the original site as racers from all over the world raced down steep Tallmadge Hill in 1935 prior to the building of Derby Downs near the Akron Airport that has been the official site since then.

A few blocks to the East on Tallmadge Ave. at what was previously known as St. Martha Church and School (now known as Blessed Trinity) founded by Rev. Msgr. John McKeever, the first school patrol program was established in 1920 and then became a nationwide program ultimately saving thousands of lives. The priest was honored by the American Automobile Association for his efforts and vision.

Additionally, Howard Street was once known as Black Wall Street before the city demolished established Black-owned businesses in the 1980s to build Route 59. Howard St. is still the divider to streets in the area going East to West.

The impact of racism has negatively affected the social, political, and economic fabrics of the North Hill community. Urban renewal and redlining disproportionately affected Black Americans by creating barriers to housing and economic opportunities and causing disinvestment. The aforementioned communities face adversity in multifaceted ways depending on the intersectionality of their identities. There is not a universal experience for any one North Hill community member, which also makes it difficult to address the needs of everyone. However, NACDC is dedicated to promoting racial and economic equity through creative placemaking efforts while embracing its diverse culture.

A Longstanding Community

The longevity of the community is demonstrated by numerous organizations that have been in existence for more than 100 years. These are—

- **The International Institute** of Akron, a 501(c)3 nonprofit agency founded in 1916, welcomes new Americans to Akron to make our community their home. The International Institute of Akron, a 501(c)3 nonprofit agency founded in 1916, welcomes new Americans to Akron to make our community their home.
- **The Polish American Citizen Club** was established in 1921 as a support and social group for a growing number of Polish immigrants. Its Friday night Fish dinners are legendary and popular serving thousands annually.
- **Boy Scout Troop 15** was established in 1917. Thousands of boys participated and had opportunities for local service, camping and personal growth.
- **Redeemer United Methodist Church** was established in 1917. The church has programs for the needy including a regular lunch offering food and support.
- **Blessed Trinity (St. Martha)** It is the culmination of the merger of Saint Martha Parish (1919) and Christ the King Parish (1935), in addition to Saint Hedwig Parish (1912) which closed September of 2009. The parish has an active Food Pantry for the needy and a senior luncheon program which serves thousands each year.
- **Trinity United Church of Christ** has a history of growth and mergers and building changes back to the early 1800's. In 1929, Trinity built its current site at 915 North Main Street and since then there have been other mergers and revisions marking it as a longstanding church in the greater Akron Area with a deep history.
- **North Hill Marble and Granite** was founded by Gaetano Buzzi in 1918 and is still serving area families and their memorial needs.
- **Jennings School** was built in 1915, with expansions constructed in 1917, 1921 and 1957. The school was named in honor of Isaac Jennings (1822-87), who has been called the father and founder of Akron Public Schools.
- **Findley CLC** is named in honor of Samuel Findley (1831-1908), who served as the superintendent of Akron Public Schools for 15 years, from 1868 until 1883. The original school building constructed in 1906, and an addition was made in 1926
- **St. Thomas Hospital** 1922. Alcoholics Anonymous was established here

Nice Things to Know About Our Community

Each December a North Hill Christmas Party is held, and hundreds annually attend. Some come from out-of-town to retain and rekindle old friendships.

In August, a North Hill Picnic serves as both a time to socialize as well as a means to honor former and more recent North Hill residents who have passed away in the previous year.

Honor is given via Facebook and other social media to deceased former residents who have served their country adding an historical and patriotic perspective to the community.

Community farms and gardens provide space for growing crops, plants and flowers and a sense of purpose to residents while increasing skills and utilizing open space.

Bettes Cemetery one of the area's oldest cemeteries is an historic burial site established in 1840.

What Our Community Members Say

Stephan Miller

I have resided in North Hill about three years. I have lived in varied communities in Ohio and also resided in China. I've always liked the feel of the neighborhood since the first time I was here. Always had a homey, classic neighborhood feeling. In recent years I'd heard so much about the incredibly rich diversity here. One of the main reasons I moved here and why I stay here is the unique community growing around Exchange house, with an open and welcoming sense of possibilities for change and local progress

Hsa Win

I have lived in the North Hill community for over 5 years As a former refugee from Thailand and a first-generation immigrant, I am very proud to call Akron my home, a home that welcomes refugees and immigrants like myself and people from all around the world. Akron gives me, my family and other refugees and immigrants a safer place to live, to hope and to dream big for today and tomorrow. Not only that, I am also giving back to my community by sharing my story, background, culture, and dance. I hope to serve in public office someday. I want to do the best I can to ensure refugees feel welcomed, keep them thriving and share successes with those born in this country as well as we seek to understand and be understood.

Special Projects

Exchange House

At its core, the mission of the Exchange House is to be the place where our community gathers to express its unique identity. As a community platform, Exchange House allows our past to mesh with our present in the hopes of planning a bright, dynamic future for our neighborhood. It's thoughtfully situated to allow residents and visitors alike to experience the authentic diversity that North Akron has to offer. With ample indoor and outdoor community space, a full kitchen and lodging options, visitors to the space can connect with community and hopefully turn strangers into friends, and friends into neighbors. Exchange House was built to be the blank canvas where everyone can come together to be heard.

Maker House

The Maker House is a women's empowerment center located next door to the Exchange House. This new public space offers a community gathering place on the first floor, office / studios on the second, and maker equipment in the attic and basement. Programming centers around arts and crafts, entrepreneurship, and women's empowerment.

People's Park

People's Park is a multi-use, exterior event space behind the Exchange House and Maker House that was created to be an inviting location for members of the community to host anything from personal meetings to public festivals. It was initially a backyard and parking lot that neighbors would walk through to get to the grocery store, but with the help of our community and the addition of a few facilities, it quickly became a destination to be enjoyed by all. This enclosed space offers a stage for performances and lectures, picnic tables for audiences & meals, a fire pit for campfires, a permanent pavilion for markets and concessions, and various additional seating. String lights allow the possibility for events to go into the night, making it a truly versatile space for any of your event needs. A Peace Pole with the word "peace" in several languages graces the park and provides a focal point.

NoHi Enterprise

NoHi Enterprise focuses on the economic success of our neighbors through entrepreneurship. NoHi Enterprise is a driver for economic development through entrepreneurship in Temple Square through platforms such as NoHi Pop-Up and Cafe, Revolving Test Kitchen, and NoTique Retail.

NoHi Pop-Up is a commercial kitchen incubator that prioritizes minority and women culinary art entrepreneurs by serving as a vehicle for development and demonstration of new cuisine concepts. Regardless of culinary experience, NoHi empowers CAE to pur-

sue their passion and talent by sharing their unique heritage and culture through opportunities for artistry and entrepreneurship.

NoTique is a pop-up retail storefront providing essential sales and management training, as well as built floor displays that foster the creative spirit while providing an outlet for creative entrepreneurs to express their talents in a meaningful way.

NoHi Café, North Hill's only coffee shop, offers an array of local coffee and tea beverages throughout the week along with limited in-person seating.

Katie Beck



At the beginning of 2020, Katie Beck stepped into the role of Executive Director for North Akron Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit building upon physical infrastructure, cultural heart, creative spirit, history, and entrepreneurial drive of artists and local small business owners in North Hill in Akron, Ohio. She is a creative community builder, director, writer, facilitator, speaker, and *activist* who works to build spaces that highlight and prioritize underrepresented voices. In 2017, she helped to open the Exchange House with the Better Block Foundation, serving as a vital resource for the community.

Since establishing Gum-Dip Theatre (GDT) in 2016, Katie has produced or directed numerous performances that celebrate, challenge, and reinvent community identity through neighborhood story circles and has an extensive resume in theatre and the arts in the greater Akron area. Katie holds a BA in Theatre, Writing, and Community and Justice Studies from Allegheny College in Meadville, PA.

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Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony at NoHi Cafe. Photo by John R. Aylward.



Envision Temple Square in People's Park. Photo by John R. Aylward.



Goods made by local vendors, makers, and artisans at NoTique. Photo by John R. Aylward.



NoHi Pop-Up Pick Up area. Photo by John R. Aylward.



Karen and Nepali dancers in the Exchange House getting ready and waiting to go onstage for the North Hill Music Festival by Himalayan Music Academy. Photo by Katie Beck.



Makerspace at the Maker House. Photo by Jason Flakes.



Patterson Park hosts many community programs, special events and numerous sports. There are varied programs for all ages. Photo by Bruce Ford.



There is a train station at the edge of North Hill offering rides through the nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Photo by Bruce Ford.



A typical North Hill neighborhood. There are many tree lined streets and expressions of patriotism. Photo by Bruce Ford.



The North Hill Library is a huge anchor for the neighborhood offering classes, events and meetings. Photo by Bruce Ford.



A special art project displayed multi-generations of families noting their heritage and celebrating a wide range of cultures. Photo by Bruce Ford.



A large group of residents attend a special Night Out. Photo by Bruce Ford.



An Akron Police Officer and Mayor Dan Horrigan flank area residents attending a special event. Photo by Bruce Ford.



Italian food is popular in the North Hill area. Luigi's is a well known restaurant. Photo by Bruce Ford.