

Westview Community Organization Financing Proposal 2020



MAY 4, 2020

Westview Community Organization
Submitted by: Jason K. Hudgins, President

The Current State

Community finances

While the full scope of the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet known, all indications are that the Westview Community Organization will need to adjust the strategy regarding our finances to ensure the long-term stability of the organization. The disruptive effects from this pandemic are different than what the WCO has faced in the past. Natural disasters are bound by geography and a recession is contained to the market, but a pandemic cuts across all sectors. The reliance of the WCO on donations from individual members of the community to carry out our mission is directly impacted by the financial instability created by COVID-19.

The community organization has through hard work and determination mitigated all community debts, transferred property into the community name, and reset annual events. All of this work was completed while simultaneously increasing donations through annual dues, fundraisers and soliciting outside financial support. The result of these actions have left the community bank account with \$4205.24 as of the May WCO Financial Report. The community also expects to receive grants in June from the Foodwell Alliance and City of Atlanta totaling \$3500 to continue the work to resurrect the community garden and establish a community education initiative.

In a normal environment the fruits of our work would lead to celebration and allow the community to chart a forward path without taking extraordinary measures. In an effort to blunt the immediate impact of the pandemic the Executive Board of the WCO has canceled all community events and sought to cut all expenses except those which are necessary.

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The Future State

No member of the community would set out on a road trip without affirming the amount of fuel in the tank. Much like embarking on a journey, organizations are best able to make decisions when we have clear and accurate information, especially in times of change or crisis. A cashflow analysis of the WCO paints a grim picture of our future financial situation. 95% of funds collected in the past year were gained through annual dues payments or donations during community fundraisers. These funds were raised from a pool of 110 individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to erode the financial support on which the WCO relies. With 1 million Georgians currently unemployed due to COVID-19 we face a reality where the community donor pool is under threat. This threat would leave the community without the ability to satisfy annual debts such as the taxes for the three community owned lots, and monthly operating expenses.

In 2019 the WCO paid taxes in the amount of \$3712. Monthly the community pays \$50 per month to maintain the website and membership system. Additionally the community pays \$70 per month to maintain our email system (this amount will be lower as the board has suspended use of all emails except the Executive Board and admin emails).

In an environment where the WCO cannot conduct in person fundraisers and where individual donors may not be able to commit to continued financial support it is vital that the community take steps to buttress the finances of the organization. Without these steps the community would exhaust all resources currently in our accounts by October 2020 or face the prospect of defaulting on key bills like taxes.

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The Proposal

Realizing that the financial headwinds are unlikely to subside as we transition into the second half of the year it is proposed that the WCO take the following steps:

1. The Westview Community Organization should sell the property known as “Stokes Park” located at 1556 Stokes Avenue.
 - a. Selling the Stokes Avenue Lot would represent a opportunity to mitigate the financial threat of COVID-19. The sale would not only allow the community to meet all financial obligations for 2020 and future years. Selling the lot would also allow forward progress on community initiatives in the midst of the pandemic.
 - b. The community should use a realtor connected to the WCO to ensure that community receives the best result.
 - c. The sale would allow the community a say in the design of anything built on the lot.
2. The proceeds from the sale of 1556 Stokes Avenue should be used to:
 - a. Complete the financial commitment to the Westview Community Garden located at 1439 South Gordon Street SW.
 - i. Initial estimates to realize the full potential of the Garden exceed \$20,000. This would include proper fencing, establishing a water source, soil mitigation, initial seeding and terracing.
 - ii. A fully realized garden will present the community with an income opportunity to help offset future costs.
 - b. Proceeds from the sale of 1556 Stokes should also be used to endow the community organization with 3 years’ worth of operating expenses. This action would remove the urgency to return to immediate fundraising as we assess the post COVID-19 environment.
3. The community should also realize the longstanding goal of creating a 501c3 nonprofit that could seek larger grants for community goals and activities.
 - a. In 2019 the WCO officially became a 501c4 organization under the updated tax code. This action while beneficial to Westview does not allow for tax write offs for donations. It also does not open the community to larger grant opportunities reserved for full nonprofits.
 - b. A 501c3 would also allow the community to extend its influence in SW Atlanta, continuing to build on a goal laid out in the Community Bylaws.
 - c. Establishment would enable the community to shelter the Community Garden land under the nonprofit protections for tax reasons.
 - d. The nonprofit should be established through an official channel and governance should follow the guidance of the Georgia Center for Non Profits.

Conclusion

In the midst of these unprecedented times this proposal represents the beginning of a dialogue to ensure that the community organization can endure. The proposal will be introduced at the May 4, 2020 WCO Meeting, published on www.westviewatlanta.org and the community social media sites.

It is requested that all questions and comments be sent to President@westviewatlanta.org so that they may be compiled into one document and forwarded to the WCO Executive Board no later than May 28, 2020.

The community will discuss the proposal at the June 1, 2020 virtual meeting. A vote on the proposal will also be called for at the June WCO Meeting allowing the WCO Board to take next steps in the event of a positive vote.