

FOCUS: CORRIDORS OF OPPORTUNITY

KEVIN ACKLIN

East Liberty success having 'ripple effect' nearby

Kevin Acklin is the chief of staff for Mayor Bill Peduto's office, where he manages the City of Pittsburgh's executive team. He also serves as chief development officer, where he oversees development related to the Department of City Planning, Urban Redevelopment Authority, Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority, Sports & Exhibition Authority and Stadium Authority. A former lawyer, Acklin graduated from Harvard University and then earned his law degree from Georgetown University. He joined the mayor's office in 2013.



Acklin

that East Liberty is experiencing. We're using all of the power that we have to rebuild these neighborhoods.

How are the city's universities helping to drive development in the East End?

Our city's growth is being driven by the talent that our universities are creating. There are two things that our universities are doing for our city: They're producing intellectual capital, and they're producing human capital – people, obviously – who are attractive to employers. They're generating a high degree of innovation, which is why President [Barack] Obama chose [Carnegie Mellon University] and [the University of Pittsburgh] for his [White House] Frontiers Conference. Our universities create a perfect storm of people, technology and innovation.

They're the fuel that is driving the resurgence of economic development in the East End.

What development projects do you see as being the most promising in the East End?

Mellon's Orchard is the last large developmental parcel in the area. It's an abandoned parking lot in the center of East Liberty, and because of the prominence of cars at the time, the planners built a road around it, effectively choking off the rest of the neighborhood. We're restoring the grids, reclaiming the street names and restoring two-way traffic to make the area more accessible to those who live and work in the East End. We're working with developers and partnering with the community to provide affordable housing and mixed retail to balance the growth that's happening in Bakery Square, and the farmer's market will remain there to maintain food equity in East Liberty.

What is the next big area to develop now that East Liberty is underway?

We're looking at communities surrounding the epicenter of East Liberty. The success of East Liberty has had a ripple effect on surrounding neighborhoods and is the result of

years of planning and of working with developers who are dedicated to working with the community. For example, we just had a ribbon cutting in Larimer as a result of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative housing development. We're also looking at Homewood and Wilksburg, as well as Garfield, which has a hot restaurant scene.

What are the biggest challenges to overcome in terms of development and growth in the East End?

I would say for the residents of a given neighborhood to have trust in the developmental process. They're very accustomed to politicians coming into disinvested neighborhoods and promising great things. There has to be a degree of trust in us, that we'll approach the community as partners and work together.

East Liberty has been successful because residents came together to speak as one voice to address their concerns. We're working very hard to develop collaboration throughout the East End. The key is balance – no one area should benefit at the expense of another. This is the underpinning of the Mayor's P4 initiative, which focuses on investment in people, the planet, place and performance.

Jennifer Brozak

You grew up here. What are the biggest changes you've seen over the years in the East End?

Yes, I grew up in South Oakland. The biggest change I've seen is the complete life cycle of these neighborhoods. As a kid growing up here in the late '70s and early '80s, I witnessed the complete depopulation of neighborhoods in the East End. Communities were disinvested, and as a result, this led to high unemployment and increased crime and drug activity, especially in areas like East Liberty and Homewood. The fabric of these neighborhoods suffered tremendously. Now we have an opportunity to rebuild that fabric. This is especially true if you look at the growth