

## ARTICLE

### **RE: Healthy Neighborhoods Project – 1500 Orland Street**

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Once again, OARC (Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation) takes on a new challenge! Through a \$15,000 grant from the Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative headed by Neighborhoods Now, OARC selected 24 houses on the 1500 block of Orland Street in West Oak Lane as a pilot for a new beautification project.

“The strength of the Initiative is that the residents work hand-in-hand with a well established CDC. Such is the case in the powerful partnership between the Community Advisory Board of Orland Street and OARC”, commented Diane-Louise Wormley, Deputy Director of Neighborhoods Now. “The mission of the Neighborhoods Now organization is to contribute to the economic vitality of the city and region by strengthening Philadelphia’s neighborhoods... and through our Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative we focus on stabilizing neighborhoods that are in early stages of decline.”

“Orland Street was a good choice for the pilot project and with OARC’s 24-year history of success in community revitalization, it was a perfect project for us to take on”, stated Jack Kitchen, CEO of OARC. “OARC tries to energize projects that cause excitement and create the momentum that spurs residents to take ownership and control”. Our managers of the project, Karyn Conway and Alfred Dorman, did a great job keeping the project on track and motivating the neighbors of Orland Street to become active participants in the project. Having the residents do 50 percent of the work was one of the most important criteria of the project as well as them being an essential part of the decision making process.”

In the beginning stages of the project, *Neighborhoods Now* held mandatory training sessions for the organizations selected to receive grants. The objective of the training was to clarify the roles of the participants and establish the project’s guidelines. In addition to attending the training with representatives from the Orland Street Block Association and Families Against Violence [which is a part of the Association], Conway and Dorman held on-going meetings with residents to guide them in selecting and prioritizing the improvements they wanted. After reviewing a list of possible “curb appeal” projects, the residents selected four priorities for block improvements: house lanterns, house numbers, porches and their banisters, and landscaping where needed.

The key residents in making this project a success were Barbara Wilkins (Chair/Team Leader of the project), Karen Dunaway (Block Captain and Co-chair of the project), and Clarissa Cargill who compiled information for project reports. In a group meeting that included one of the more senior residents, Kathryn Pender, a 34-year resident of Orland Street, the ladies shared how they felt about their block being selected for the pilot beautification project. They all felt it was one of the best opportunities that Orland Street has ever had...and as Dunaway commented, “It’s brought the block closer!” Having grown-up on the 1500 block of Orland Street, Dunaway has a genuine concern for her fellow neighbors. “Since the project began, we have witnessed many positive changes”, stated Wilkins, “neighbors are outside more often and friendlier with each other.” Ms. Pender noted that more men are getting involved in sprucing-up the homes. One example they sighted was seeing a neighbor who works nights clearing debris from his front yard and sweeping-up very late at night. They concluded that with the extra lighting from the new house lanterns he is now able to work outside his house whenever it’s convenient for his schedule. With the enhancements now in place, the neighbors have a stronger sense of ownership and feel safer with the extra lighting. Ms. Pender mentioned that she and other neighbors can now sit outside longer to enjoy the outdoors in more pleasant surroundings. The sense of pride in the neighborhood is evident. People are doing more on their own and those that were not as involved in the project are

now asking for information about the project. Dunaway reported, "Other blocks have asked how they can have this type of project in their neighborhood too. That's a real sign that we did something to be proud of!"

In addition to the obvious pride of the Orland Street Block Association and Families Against Violence about their block's new look, they stated, "We are so appreciative of OARC's generosity and we will do what we can to ensure that as the chosen pilot block, we live up to the expectations of what a *healthy neighborhood* should reflect." They went on to express appreciation for the pleasant leadership style of Conway and Dorman. As Conway commented, she is also proud of the results of the project. "Without the level of participation and commitment demonstrated by the Association's leadership, we would not have been able to accomplish our goal...Orland Street looks beautiful!" Dorman chimed into to say, "It was a true partnership and a pleasure working with such motivated residents."

For more information about OARC projects, contact 215-549-9462 or visit [www.OARCPhilly.org](http://www.OARCPhilly.org).