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MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** CITY COUNCIL  
**FROM:** MAYOR MICHAEL E. CHEREPKO  
**SUBJECT:** BUDGET MESSAGE  
**DATE:** 11/14/2020  
**CC:** ANNETTE JAMES, CLERK  
RYAN STURGESS, CONTROLLER



*Please find the attached preliminary draft budget for the FY-2021. The Home Rule Charter requires the Mayor to present a balanced budget to City Council on or before November 15, and a final spending plan must be adopted prior to December 31, 2020.*

## **REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES**

The preliminary 2021 budget is balanced at \$22,101,195.00 – reflecting the best estimate of revenues and expenditures and isolating as many variables as possible that can be quantified within the budgeting process. This year’s spending plan illustrates our commitment to the sustainability of the City of McKeesport and shows a near \$575,000 decrease in expenditures from 2020. Keep in mind that this would have been a \$1 million decrease in controllable expenditures before a half-million-dollar increase in our fixed costs, which we will discuss shortly.

In 2020, my administration continued our third year of the McKeesport Rising Project – making tangible improvements to our City’s aesthetics and infrastructure while laying the groundwork for a sustainable budget that includes accurate, consistent revenue streams for years to come. As our City officials and residents are well-aware, this endeavor continues to be made possible through the 2017 sale of the Municipal Authority of the City of McKeesport to Pennsylvania American Water. We have discussed, at length, this transaction’s role as a strategy to save the City of McKeesport from Act 47 municipal bankruptcy.

Previous years’ ledgers demonstrated the City of McKeesport operating with a functional deficit of several million dollars, for which we compensated annually with infusions of capital through the liquidation of smaller assets and using that revenue to supplement operating costs each year. This administration established a Mayor’s Reserve Fund that could support City finances in place of a standard surplus. Our successful operation can be attributed to the increased collection of various taxes and fees, combined with best practices to reduce expenditures including a decrease in staffing through attrition; investment in infrastructure and community development programs to grow our tax base; and, of course, the one-time sale of city assets. In this case, the one-time asset sale allowed for the initiation and sustainability of the McKeesport Rising Project.

The McKeesport Rising line item again will set aside funds – this year, \$800,000 – to target blight,

preserve our neighborhoods, improve our infrastructure, promote economic development, and modernize our public safety operations. Through this project, we will continue to improve residents' quality of life, while guaranteeing the stability they will need in coming years.

When we look at McKeesport Rising funds, it is important that we see more than a line item – we should see our budget's mechanism for solvency, while knowing its limitations. Using what we've budgeted for McKeesport Rising in the coming year will allow us to complete essential projects without experiencing a deficit, despite unavoidable increases – the half-million we mentioned earlier – in Minimum Municipal Obligations to our pension funds, healthcare costs, and contractual wage increases.

The FY-2021 budget reflects any salary increases for all of the four union collective bargaining agreements to date, as well as their corresponding benefits. These costs historically have risen at a rate well above any modest increases in revenues, as payroll accounts for more than 40 percent of our budget, and roughly 25 percent is comprised of the aforementioned healthcare and pension obligations. As we acknowledge each year, these challenging costs are not unique to the City of McKeesport, and nearly every municipality and business across the nation faces increasing employee-related costs on an annual basis.

To cover those costs, we talk every year about how the City cannot rely on a single surge in revenue to correct consistent problems. For that reason, City Administrator Thomas Maglicco and Finance Director Tasha Phelps will continue to tighten our budget, as seen with the near \$575,000 decrease in spending despite our half-million dollars in fixed increases from 2020 to 2021 while holding the line on our current property tax rate. On the other side of that coin, Chief Revenue Officer Matthew Gergely will work diligently to increase revenues that are due to the City – ensuring better collection on delinquent taxes and fees while accurately tracking current and potential revenue streams.

I am sure City Council is aware that we are doing more with less. That includes revenue, resources, and employees. We have hired a handful of part-time employees as we continue to decrease our full-time workforce through attrition, which has, in some cases, eliminated entire departments, decreased others by more than 50 percent, and reduced citywide staffing by more than 25 percent. Just this year, we have said goodbye to several employees who have been with the City for 20-40 years, respectively. They will be greatly missed, but I must say, I am proud of our staff for taking on more work with fewer hands. They know wholeheartedly that we function as a team to achieve the collective goal of improving our City's financial outlook. Their effort shows great support for my administration's motto of "Working Together for a Better McKeesport."

Thanks to Mr. Maglicco, Ms. Phelps, and Mr. Gergely, we have shaped a balanced, detailed spending plan for the upcoming fiscal year. As previously stated, we will maintain our current property tax rate across our two-tier tax system at this time 8.26 mills on buildings and 20.5 mills on land. Having a low property tax rate is vital, not only in helping our many residents on fixed incomes during these trying economic times, but also in attracting new residents and businesses to affordable properties in McKeesport, and because of that, the people of McKeesport will continue to pay less in taxes than property owners across much of Allegheny County.

Property taxes, and our quarterly Municipal Service Fees -- \$75 per quarter for each household, unless the homeowner is a senior citizen, for whom there is a discounted rate of \$60 per quarter – support McKeesport's ability to provide the level of services that our taxpayers deserve. We already have increased our collection rate for fees and earned income taxes by keeping a more accurate record of, who

is moving in and out of McKeesport and what businesses are setting up shop here. By collecting more of what is due, it has allowed us to maintain a low property tax rate despite the ever-increasing costs of health insurance, our Minimum Municipal Obligations required to be paid into our pension funds, as well as fuel and utilities.

In fact, despite our gains, we have never come close to generating enough revenue to cover the non-negotiable increases in our pension obligations or the fixed increases in our healthcare benefits before we implemented McKeesport Rising.

## **McKEESPORT RISING**

Over the past three years, the McKeesport Rising Project has allowed my administration to improve the quality of life for all McKeesporters – utilizing various revenue sources and opportunities to carry out improvements in infrastructure, neighborhood preservation, public safety, and economic development. In our public works and police departments, we have made equipment purchases, including vehicles, machines, and advanced technology. We awarded demolition contracts that have allowed for the removal of more than 400 blighted structures.

Across these budget years, McKeesport Rising has been about my administration's commitment to keeping neighborhoods safer, creating jobs through attracting investments and improving infrastructure, fighting blight and revitalizing our residential neighborhoods and business districts, protecting tax dollars and maintaining fiscal responsibility, and ultimately, building community.

The 2021 budget allows for \$800,000 of reserved funds to be spent in continuation of the McKeesport Rising Project. Also, it should be noted that additional sections of this budget will address projects in departments such as recreation, police, and community development, which are harmonious with the McKeesport Rising theme.

As you witness McKeesport growing and thriving after the decline that came decades ago with steel mill closures, I encourage you to picture the McKeesport Rising logo that we introduced in 2018 – a phoenix proudly embracing our City and inviting us to bounce back from an array of socioeconomic hardships.

With every aspect of the McKeesport Rising Project, we are working toward the McKeesport I'm confident we can be.

## **REVIEWING FY-2020 AND LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021**

Looking back on 2020, this year was far from normal. The regional impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic is undeniable when we look at our local economy, our municipal budget, our governmental responsibilities, and the community events we have missed this year. There is no question that our concern for the health of our families, friends, and neighbors is first and foremost. But beyond that, our next obstacle to overcome is the impact of COVID on our community's morale. There are programs in place to ensure we are serving McKeesport's citizens to the best of our abilities, despite this pandemic.

Special funding sources have allowed the City to offset a portion of its cost on personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning products and procedures, police presence and other public safety measures, and more. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development set aside more than \$790,000 in COVID relief for McKeesport as a specified entitlement community, and we are in the process of

determining federally approved uses for these funds across our city's departments.

The following subcategories of this budget message – Garbage and Recycling, Recreation, Public Safety, Public Improvements, and Community/Economic Development – will address what each City department has experienced during 2020 in terms of obstacles and accomplishments, and it will outline potential improvements in the year ahead.

### **GARBAGE AND RECYCLING:**

In 2021, we will enter year two of our three-year garbage and recycling contract with County Hauling. This company was awarded the contract in November of 2019 after winning an electronic bidding process with Enviro21, which helped us find a price that would provide a significant savings to the City. The contract was awarded at \$79.75 per ton for refuse hauling, which translated to a 30 percent savings in our garbage collection services in 2020.

That being said, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the initial complications of the City's transition to service with County Hauling. As we transitioned into 2020, the company appeared to have underestimated the complexity of our urban route, which includes a lot of on-street parking and alley pickups. What they assumed would be a two-day service quickly reverted to McKeesport's traditional five-day pickup schedule. Even then, increased tonnage followed nationwide COVID trends that led to delayed pickups over the course of several months. As you know, these major issues are since resolved, and we've seen significant improvements in pickup routines and customer service. My office will continue to monitor this service closely to be sure McKeesport residents are receiving high-quality services.

We will maintain this agreement in 2021, as its three-year freeze on rates greatly benefits our financial situation. This rate is relatively locked in for eight years, including 2020, as the contract includes an option to extend with just a 2 percent increase for up to five years. In a nutshell, seven years from now, we could be paying a quarter of a million dollars less for garbage collection services than we paid in 2019.

### **RECREATION:**

To the public, the City of McKeesport was most visibly affected by COVID in terms of recreation. With public health guidelines and social distancing recommendations in place across the Commonwealth and Allegheny County, nearly all of our favorite activities were canceled in 2020. This includes our Easter Egg Hunt, Good Neighbor Day, Summer Concert Series, International Village, Halloween Parade, and Salute to Santa Parade. We were able to host our Fourth of July fireworks, and we are about to begin the Festival of Trees. These events, while they may be different from years past, were/are able to take place with visitors safely observing the state and county recommendations.

Despite the lack of formal programming, in FY-2020, we continued to earn our keep as a Playful City, USA. We added COVID signage and hand-sanitizing stations to our local playgrounds and Renziehausen Park, where facilities remained open with restrictions in place. Our pavilions remained open throughout the summer and fall picnic season, and we brought in a record rental income of \$47,000 (compared to the past decade). Our ballfield revenues also increased due to tournament play and new leagues.

Even during recreational downtime, our staff and outside contractors stayed hard at work in Renziehausen Park, thanks to Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD) funding for general operations

and capital projects – this year for an overhaul, including safety and accessibility improvements, that are underway on the Lickert Walking Trail. While COVID caused RAD to take a major hit in terms of sales tax revenue, it will continue to honor its commitment to contractual assets such as Renziehausen Park in 2021 in terms of operational assistance. While we may not take on major capital improvements there next year, we will utilize our \$760,704 RAD allotment in doing our best to keep Renzie beautiful for visitors from the City of McKeesport and across Allegheny County.

In fact, to make our park and its walking trails more accessible to all residents, we will enter a study thanks to an \$81,000 grant through the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County for the CDC Reach Program. We will examine pedestrian access to Renziehausen Park and the Great Allegheny Passage for users of all ages, races, and abilities. Please stay tuned for community-based surveys and information sessions that may take place in person or online in coming months.

We hope to bring back our community’s favorite activities for children and adults of all ages in 2021: International Village, the Lions Summer Concert Series, the Renzie Rib Fest, Patriotism Parade, Movies in the Park; the Easter Egg Hunt, Fishing Derby, Halloween Parade, Christmas Parade, Festival of Trees, and various fireworks displays.

I’m so proud of the countless volunteers from the McKeesport Recreation Board who did their best to make the Festival of Trees happen this year. This event opens the day after December’s council meeting, and I hope everyone can make it there or catch the display online. Anyone who isn’t comfortable coming out to the park due to health concerns or other reasons will be able to view a virtual tour later this month on the City’s website ([www.mckeesport-pa.gov](http://www.mckeesport-pa.gov)) or the City of McKeesport – Mayor’s Office Facebook page. With that option in mind, we will encourage residents to send us photos of their home trees, which we will post online, along with the virtual tour, for a “Christmas from a Distance” display. McKeesport Recreation Board members also will work on a list of streets with outdoor displays to encourage driving tours and other activities that small groups can enjoy from their cars or their computer screens.

Let’s all cross our fingers as we move into 2021 that we will soon be able to gather again and enjoy the wonderful recreational assets within our City. As I’ve said before, they make McKeesport a wonderful place to live and visit – a true destination.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY:**

In terms of public safety, we have several exciting developments in the McKeesport Police Department.

The City of McKeesport – through initiatives implemented by the McKeesport Police Department, the Mayor’s Office, the Mayor’s Select Committee on Crime and Violence, and various partner agencies – remains dedicated to the goal of reducing gun violence by shifting the cultural paradigms that currently foster an addiction to crime and violence. Our police will continue to implement their McKeesport Alternative Policing Strategies (MAPS) and engage youth with an array of positive life-learning experiences, especially through our Gun Violence Reduction Program (GVRP) funded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). This program has been successful in 2019 and 2020. It will continue to be a multi-faceted approach that includes partnerships with the McKeesport Police Department, including its Violent Crimes Unit; the Office of Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr.; Allegheny County Health Department; Allegheny County Juvenile Probation; Pennsylvania Adult Probation; Magisterial District Judge Eugene Riazzi; McKeesport Housing Authority; McKeesport Area School District; and McKeesport Healthier Communities PartnerSHIP (State Health Improvement Plan), specifically its Crime and Safety Logic



Model and its Youth Logic Model; and the McKeesport Area Ministerium.

With GVRP, the City of McKeesport's mission is to improve the community through problem-solving strategies that counter violent crime and related quality-of-life issues. From a law enforcement standpoint, the program includes proactive policing strategies, not only to reduce crime statistics but also to quell the fear of crime among residents. GVRP partners will work together to provide valuable, sustainable, and strategic investigations of matters such as violent crime, drug use and sales, gang activity, and youth roles in criminal activity. With a focus on community policing, law enforcement personnel will work directly with intervention agencies, crime and safety committees, youth-serving organizations, educators, and other respected community members to reach at-risk individuals. A major component of the GVRP was the hiring of a community outreach specialist, Mr. Keith Murphy of McKeesport's Healthy Village Learning Institute, to implement street mentoring and organize programs that will influence children, teens, and young adults in a positive way. His role will extend further into community groups and schools as this project continues in 2021, as this portion of the program was stunted in 2020 due to COVID restrictions.

New in 2021, the City will utilize \$99,000 of its allotment from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to install the ShotSpotter system, which instantly will notify officers of shootings in progress with real-time data delivered to dispatch centers, patrol cars, and even smart phones. These instant alerts enable first-responders to aid victims, collect evidence and quickly apprehend armed, dangerous offenders. ShotSpotter's actionable intelligence can then be used to prevent future crimes by positioning law enforcement when and where crime is likely to occur. With this technology, our police will possess a scientific barometer of success, with the notion that smart policing will lead to fewer shootings.

Residents and City Council members might ask, "How does this technology work?" ShotSpotter combines wide-area acoustic surveillance with centralized cloud-based analysis to provide a gunfire alert and analysis service. The service uses acoustic sensors that activate when gunfire occurs, providing comprehensive outdoor coverage over complex urban geographies, such as the hills and valleys of McKeesport's topography combines with the interruptions caused by high-rise buildings and other structures. When there is a shooting outdoors, ShotSpotter sensors and software triangulate and pinpoint the precise location of each round fired within seconds. Detailed incident data is immediately sent to an Incident Review Center, where a gunfire and acoustics expert analyzes the data and qualifies the incident. A validated alert is sent to dispatch centers directly to field personnel through their approved devices – all in under a minute.

The key features of the ShotSpotter service include a constant, 360-degree wide-area acoustic surveillance throughout large coverage areas (specifically 2 square miles in McKeesport's agreement); immediate alerts when no one calls 911; precise location including latitude/longitude and street address; the number and exact time of rounds fired; identification of fully-automatic or high-capacity weapons; notification of multiple shooters, their position, speed, and direction of travel, if moving; detailed forensic data for investigation, prosecution, and analysis; and easily accessible single and cumulative or historical reports.

I, along with Chief Adam Alfer and Assistant Chief Mark Steele, believe the key benefits of the ShotSpotter service include enhanced situational awareness and officer safety; faster evidence collection and witness identification; court-admissible, detailed forensic reports; increased arrests in instances of

firearms-related crimes; improved community relations and collaboration; proactive gun crime pattern analysis and strategic deterrence; a supplement to the complex technology infrastructure being built across Allegheny County with License Plate Recognition (LPR) cameras, of which we have approximately 100 in McKeesport; an expedited response to shooting victims; increased suspect leads and subsequently suspect arrests; and the increased ability to identify homicides and injured victims.

Today, when the McKeesport Police Department responds to a report of shots fired, multiple units respond to every area where calls are generated, and due to McKeesport's topography, this could include multiple neighborhoods. Most times, police are unable to locate a crime scene based on information provided by callers alone. Officers are checking the immediate area where a call was generated – looking for evidence and/or victims. ShotSpotter will guide McKeesport officers to a location with specific coordinates within roughly 80 feet – leading to more awareness and actionable situational intelligence when responding to an incident while providing for safer and more effective strategic and tactical response. These methods, according to ShotSpotter data, have proven to increase apprehensions and firearm confiscations while increasing officer safety and reinforcing positive community engagement in these types of investigations. There has shown to be a faster location of evidence and witnesses in cases where ShotSpotter is used, therefore improving the productivity of investigative resources and strengthening the forensic data of a given investigation. With this data, prosecutions are strengthened and convictions are made. Using ShotSpotter data, experts can distinguish between patterns in gunfire and provide comprehensive information that is otherwise unobtainable. This feature would improve areas of crime reporting and analysis in order to track improvements and support funding in future years.

Running concurrently with each and every resource we put into our police department, I must commend District Attorney Zappala for maintaining a constant working relationship with our local police. His commitment to making our City safer is second to none. I truly appreciate all of his support over the past nine years.

With the ever-changing society in which we live, our police department's administration is always reviewing departmental policies and procedures, utilizing continuing education and training programs, and maximizing technology to benefit the City of McKeesport and neighboring Dravosburg (through 2023). Also, through our local community development department, McKeesport police will continue to utilize federal CDBG funds, through its contracted allotment for community policing and saturation patrols. In 2021, the McKeesport Police Department will continue to benefit from grant funding awarded in 2020 through the U.S. Department of Justice for Coronavirus Relief and the COPS Hiring Program.

The McKeesport Fire Department, under the leadership of Fire Chief Jeffrey Tomovcsik, will continue to collaborate with other departments, including police and code enforcement, to streamline various services. Firefighters have increased their training in rescue and general firefighting practices. In 2019, the fire department reinstated its Gold Level of voluntary certification with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This certification will be up for renewal in 2024. Our fire department shares this impressive designation, with forty departments across the state and only six in Allegheny County. In 2021, the fire department will continue to review its practices in order to update its Insurance Standards Office ratings. This process was delayed in 2020 due to COVID setbacks.

Through Allegheny County CARES funding, the McKeesport Fire Department received reimbursement for overtime costs for lost time due to COVID. Another round of COVID relief is anticipated later this year in

the amount of approximately \$25,000 from the state Fire Commissioner's Office.

The McKeesport Ambulance Rescue Service has experienced an increased call volume in dealing with the COVID pandemic. Nearly every call they receive is "COVID possible," which causes paramedics and EMTs to take extra precautions and use additional PPE and other materials. Even with this heightened response, MARS is still here to answer every call and provide emergency care to the best of their abilities. MARS has received piecemeal funding throughout 2020 to help with COVID relief, but this agency still is reliant on its upcoming subscription drive and insurance billing to remain solvent. While MARS' budget is not directly tied to our City budget, these first-responders work hand in hand with our police and firefighters on a daily basis, and I'm quite proud of the work they do. Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians continue to provide excellent prehospital care throughout the city of McKeesport and neighboring communities including Duquesne, Port Vue, Dravosburg, and Glassport. Under Chief Bill Miller, who is the ambulance director and our City's Emergency Management Coordinator, the City sponsors training and testing as mandated by the Federal Emergency Management Assistance (FEMA) program. Also, thanks to a \$7,000 grant from Noble Environmental, the City of McKeesport will place automated external defibrillators in its public buildings. These units will be compatible with equipment utilized by MARS staff.

#### **PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS:**

As acknowledged in discussion of "McKeesport Rising," the number of abandoned structures continues to grow within our City, and the negative impact of blight hinders our ability to revitalize McKeesport each and every day. In addition to this massive undertaking, we will continue to invest our own resources in demolition, paving, and maintenance, under direction of Public Works Director Steve Kondrosky.

The blight removal and road repairs of the McKeesport Rising Project were the highlight of our public improvements in 2020, with McKeesport Rising and Community Development funds supporting improvements across the City's twelve wards.

In 2021, we will continue to utilize Community Development and McKeesport Rising funds to make repairs to City streets – paving main thoroughfares and neighborhood roads that are in major disrepair and patching others to get by for another season. It is extremely important to make improvements where we can in order to preserve our neighborhoods and to attract new residents and businesses to our City.

#### **ECONOMIC/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:**

The impact of COVID can be felt across our regional and in our local economy. While we do our best as a City to support local businesses and encourage our residents to shop local, we understand everyone is constrained financially with this pandemic's impact on their households.

From an economic standpoint, COVID unfortunately has slowed numerous development opportunities, and in a few cases, has halted them completely. There is so much uncertainty in the business world right now, especially in terms of profits, overhead expenses, and investments, that people are hesitant to make major investments or expand. Anytime you talk about business development, it's no different from any one of us looking at our own financial stability. We weigh risks against opportunities in terms of employment, investments, or other prospects. Right now, the risk is greater.



We had so much momentum coming into 2020, and it's safe to say most of us were shocked by where the year has brought us. Just look at where we are now. Don't get me wrong – we are still moving ahead, but some of the opportunities we thought were guaranteed successes have fallen flat.

We still are extremely excited about the services we hope to bring to our area, especially downtown. Every day, we continue to see developers hard at work at the People's Bank Building and Executive Building. These locations soon will be ready for occupants of all types. With a range of offices and retail spaces, there are endless opportunities.

Thanks to a near-\$3 million PennDOT Multi-Modal Transportation Fund award secured by state Sen. James R. Brewster, work is about to begin on the nearby Lysle Boulevard Parking Garage, which will serve downtown visitors and business tenants. Tube City Center, located in the former Daily News building, lost one tenant to COVID but is full of businesses and agencies that are doing their best during this difficult time. Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr.'s Mon Valley Support Center is seeing more daily activity as a hub for electronically moderated hearings and other services that have proven quite useful with other county closures.

Across from City Hall, Community Development Director A.J. Tedesco and the Redevelopment Authority of the City of McKeesport are in the process of acquiring dilapidated structures to clear the way for new development as part of the McKees Point Development Group's Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP), facilitated by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

In November 2019, the McKees Point Development Group was awarded Neighborhood Partnership Program funding through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development from UPMC Health Plan, Duquesne Light, First Commonwealth Bank and Noble Environmental.

Over the course of a six-year grant period, the McKees Point Development Group will receive \$2.7 million – annually receiving \$100,000 from UPMC Health Plan, \$100,000 from Duquesne Light, \$100,000 from First Commonwealth Bank, and \$150,000 from Noble Environmental. Throughout this timeframe, the McKees Point Development Group will serve as the fiscal sponsor for a downtown economic development plan, neighborhood rehabilitation to improve the city's housing stock, and investments in stabilizing the former Penn McKee Hotel – all part of the McKeesport Rising Project. The City, Redevelopment Authority, and McKees Point Development Group applied for state and federal funding in 2020 to conduct environmental remediation and site preparation of the former Penn-McKee Hotel. These pursuits are taking place in partnership with the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh, who prepared a "Visioning" presentation and environmental assessment of the hotel in late 2018 and further updated it in 2019. We expect to receive word on these applications early in 2021.

Also, as part of the NPP, Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh has made significant progress in its first year of programming within the City of McKeesport. Combining NPP and SPP funding, Rebuilding Together completed work on 20 homes in 2020. Of the 20 households served, all have low-to-moderate income below 60 percent of the area's median income, with the majority of them under 50 percent of that median income. Of the 20 households served, seventeen (17) included senior citizens (60 and older); three (3) were single female head of household (younger than 60); seven (7) included individuals with a documented disability; and five (5) included minority/persons of color. If applications for NPP, SPP, HOME, and Federal Home Loan Bank funding are successful, Rebuilding Together has the potential to

complete projects in at least 40 households within 2021. The organization also seeks to acquire vacant properties for a potential Rehab for Resale application.

Getting back to the downtown area, all within 100 yards, there is so much happening in McKeesport, despite any COVID setbacks. And as we continue working to rebuild our City's economy, I always mention the fact that we cannot allow ourselves to get caught up in the prospect of one particular industry, as our region once did with steel. We must diversify our economy to guarantee sustainability of our business districts as well as our neighborhoods. We have made countless economic strides in recent years: we've attracted new retail and industrial development; we've linked existing businesses with resources to grow; and we've partnered with state, county, and federal governments to improve our bridges and roadways.

All of this hard work gained HUD's attention, aside from the investment this federal agency makes in our city with annual CDBG funding and other programs. Our City received three visits from Mid-Atlantic Regional Director Joseph DeFelice. Mr. DeFelice toured the City's housing developments and business districts. He hosted two economic development roundtables, highlighting McKeesport's position as a federally recognized Opportunity Zone. The final session included HUD Secretary Ben Carson.

As fellow elected officials, I would ask City Council to stand by me as we take a cautiously optimistic stance on redevelopment. We are poised for progress and will continue to build key connections during these trying times. We must continue with our current momentum, and we cannot allow COVID to hold us back.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is no question that 2020 was a unique year – not only for the City of McKeesport, but for everyone.

When we discuss the City's future in terms of public safety, recreation, and community development – all the components of McKeesport Rising – we really are talking about quality of life. That's why my administration's motto of "Working Together for a Better McKeesport" represents the notion that each of us is responsible for our City's outcome.

No matter what happens around us, we are investing all we have in making our community a better place to be, and I'm proud of that accomplishment. We are building a better McKeesport one brick at a time, and this administration has laid a substantial part of the necessary foundation. We are now able to build upon that foundation, even though we face significant obstacles and challenges in providing quality municipal services despite an ever-decreasing tax base. Those challenges increased further in 2020, but we made it through.

We should all take pride in "McKeesport Rising" as we make every effort to revive McKeesport's economy, appearance, and morale. We must rebuild our tax base, improve our neighborhoods, and encourage home ownership – all while continuing to find creative ways to provide the services that McKeesport residents deserve.