



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **WILKINSBURG'S MERGER STEERING COMMITTEE TO SEEK MORE COMMUNITY INPUT BEFORE CITY COUNCIL VOTE AND A WILKINSBURG BALLOT REFERENDUM**

*Wilkinsburg opts to extend process to place an annexation referendum on the ballot in the Borough of Wilkinsburg*

WILKINSBURG, PA, JULY 12, 2021 – Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation (WCDC) and Wilkinsburg Mayor Marita Garrett announced today that a referendum on merging Wilkinsburg with the City of Pittsburgh would be delayed until a future election cycle, likely next Spring's primary election. The WCDC's volunteer resident Merger Steering Committee recommended this extension, even though more than enough petition signatures have already been gathered to place the issue on the ballot, to give Wilkinsburg residents and members of Pittsburgh City Council more time for community dialog and consideration.

"This conversation is about equity and opportunity for both municipalities," said Mayor Garrett. "Right now, our tax rate is oppressive and prevents home ownership, wealth generation and job creation for mostly black residents who are leaving the borough as a result. Wilkinsburg needs to be a true part of the City's family in order to reach its full potential and as history has proven with existing shared services contracts, this can and will be a win-win."

"After productive meetings with Pittsburgh City Council, community stakeholders and the public at large, we have concluded that the compressed schedule required to place the referendum on the November, 2021 ballot would not allow for the productive dialogue appropriate to address important details related to the seamless integration of the two municipalities" said WCDC Executive Director Tracey Evans.

Many prominent Wilkinsburg residents are supporting this effort. "It would be beneficial for Wilkinsburg to merge with Pittsburgh because the excessive taxes in Wilkinsburg are not sustainable and are holding Wilkinsburg's resurgence back," said Derrick Tillman, co-chair of the WCDC's Merger Analysis Committee. "There are still issues in Pittsburgh, particularly related to the health and well-being of its black community, and I believe we can and should use this merger as an opportunity to improve both communities."

"Merging with the city would ease the financial burden on residents, particularly seniors and families with school-aged children," Vanessa Buffry, Wilkinsburg resident and nonprofit director, and co-chair of the WCDC's Merger Analysis Committee, explained. "At the same time, we'd enjoy improved services and a more small-business-friendly tax environment, increasing the vitality of our business corridors and underpinning our strong sense of community."

Revenue rebalancing would reduce Wilkinsburg's regionally high property tax rate to Pittsburgh's level, which would relieve inequitable property tax burden for majority-minority residents and unlock neighborhood reinvestment.

A merger with Pittsburgh would give Wilkinsburg residents greater access to basic resources and comprehensive housing programs that would help reduce displacement caused by continued decline and vacancy as well as by gentrification.

To learn more about the Wilkinsburg Pittsburgh merger initiative and get updates, visit **[wilkinsburgmerger.org](http://wilkinsburgmerger.org)** or call (412) 727-7855.

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