

DEC Raingarden Installation Team
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PUSH Blue: Developing an Equitable Green Economy in Buffalo

By Ken Parker, PUSH Blue Program Manager

The 477-square-mile Buffalo River watershed includes waters flowing from the Buffalo River and its tributaries into Lake Erie near the head of the Niagara River. The watershed is widely used by City of Buffalo residents and visiting tourists for sport fishing, sailing, kayaking, swimming, environmental education and other recreational uses. It is also an important stopover habitat for migratory birds.

The watershed, however, has a history of heavy environmental stress from development

and industry in steel, grain, and chemical production. Furthermore, industrial waste was dumped directly in the river leading to the Buffalo River being named one of the most polluted waterways in the nation. These histories merge with the more current effects of contamination of the Buffalo River and surrounding watershed by antiquated Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) stormwater management systems in the city. The BSA is currently under an EPA consent decree to significantly reduce CSO waste by implementing its \$400 million

plan to reduce overflows, of which \$90 million is designated for green infrastructure projects.

A critical partner in the city's effort to improve the health of the watershed is [People United for Sustainable Housing \(PUSH Buffalo\)](#); a local membership-based community organization with a mission to mobilize residents to create strong neighborhoods with quality, affordable housing, expand local hiring opportunities, and advance economic and environmental justice in Buffalo.

Improving local water quality is a core part of that work, and PUSH has addressed that through growing its role in developing regional green infrastructure. In 2013, PUSH launched PUSH Blue Eco Landscaping ([PUSH Blue](#)) to create a variety of storm water retention interventions throughout PUSH's Green Development Zone on Buffalo's West Side – directly adjacent to the Niagara River, which flows from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. The Green Development Zone is PUSH's thirty-block place-based just transition strategy that leverages community organizing, community control of land, affordable housing development, weatherization investments, job training, and revenue generating social enterprise activities as a means of building community wealth and enhancing resiliency.

PUSH Blue is a team of stormwater mitigation and outreach specialists that are on the forefront of the community-

based water management movement. The team has completed more than thirty stormwater interventions on property it owns in the Green Development Zone that include rain gardens, permeable pavers, living roofs, bioswales, and underground and above-ground cisterns.

Due to PUSH's extensive experience in completing water management projects on vacant urban land, the BSA included PUSH's work in its plan to reduce overflows. PUSH also partnered with the BSA on its Community Water Partnership Program, which included PUSH Blue's completion of over 140 bioretention installations on nineteen acres of vacant lots across the city and a scaling up of its green infrastructure division, providing expanded opportunities for both training and permanent placement of successful trainees. Through its comprehensive sustainable

landscape and green infrastructure training programs, PUSH Buffalo is a community leader working to address stormwater challenges while also creating good green jobs accessible to Buffalo residents.

As part of PUSH Blue's continued commitment to the green job workforce, during the summer of 2018, PUSH established a training program in collaboration with the [National Green Infrastructure Certification Program \(NGICP\)](#). PUSH now offers regional trainings to certify others under this national standard. PUSH's workforce currently employs three experienced and certified NGICP professionals, who are currently the only certified individuals in Western NY. Program Manager Ken Parker is one of twenty-one people in the entire country, and the only person in New York State, who is a NGICP trainer. PUSH Buffalo is committed to developing the most skilled and



NGICP Instructive Session, Nov. 2018
Photo Credit: PUSH Blue, Buffalo

knowledgeable individuals in the field of green infrastructure. Through its training program, PUSH hopes to expand the number of people in the region certified and trained in green infrastructure.

In order for Buffalo, and other cities, to successfully implement green infrastructure projects, the city needs a skilled workforce to implement these systems. The NGICP certification offers a training pathway for workers to access skills, contractors to find the most skilled individuals to hire, and property owners to know that those installing and maintaining their systems have the necessary skills to complete the work. Training Buffalo residents for these jobs also helps ensure that the dollars spent on green infrastructure stay in the city and its economy, as well as provide opportunities to those who have borne a disproportionate share of the

burden of water pollution. Such work also builds the region's capacity to continue building and maintaining this infrastructure.

The best plans and the ones with the highest likelihood of success build on the assets currently available and address the daily needs of those currently living in our communities. Over the last several years, PUSH has worked to develop a vision for an equitable green economy anchored by new public and private investments in green jobs and sustainable technologies. The PUSH Blue project proposes strategies that meet these local needs, reinforces the positive work that has been going on for several years, and works toward building comprehensive and sustainable neighborhoods with opportunities for all who live here. Such investments, at a neighborhood scale, provide spaces for innovation in green infrastructure and use of new

technologies, demonstrations of techniques and technologies that will be replicable throughout the region, and help to address the significant stormwater challenges so many of our communities face.

Resources:

National Green Infrastructure Certification Program (NGICP). <https://ngicp.org>.

People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH Buffalo). <https://pushbuffalo.org>.

PUSH Blue. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/PUSHBlueWNY>.



Project #77 Site Delivery
Photo Credit: PUSH Blue, Buffalo



DEC Training, Aug. 2018
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