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Three Playbook Initiatives Gain Momentum, New Investments

Work Begins Efforts to Revitalize Erie's Eastside Community and Preserve Affordable Housing

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ERIE, PA (July 26, 2023) – Infinite Erie, formed and funded by Erie Insurance, The Erie Community Foundation, and ECGRA, marked significant progress on three investment ready projects outlined in Erie's Investment Playbook.

In June, the Hamot Health Foundation and The Erie Community Foundation pledged \$15,000 to study the feasibility of the Burton School Project; the Erie County Land Bank was awarded a \$400,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to form the Cornerstone Community Land Trust (CCLT), and a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the Grow Erie initiative to begin a generational transformation of Savocchio Opportunity Park.

"This is just the beginning," said Karen Bilowith, The Erie Community Foundation President & CEO. "Each of these initiatives is part of the Investment Playbook — place-based neighborhood strategies — to revitalize neighborhoods and increase equity across Erie County. By coordinating inclusive growth strategies, Infinite Erie is organized across public, private, and civic leadership to implement Erie's Investment Playbook."

Infinite Erie worked with the Erie County Landbank and members of the CCLT steering committee to secure \$400,000 in funding to form the CCLT, an initiative committed to creating and preserving affordable housing throughout Erie County. Money awarded through the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement (PHARE) fund will be dedicated to increasing the supply of permanently affordable housing and reducing future potential gentrification of struggling neighborhoods.

Revitalization of the Burton School is another Infinite Erie Investment Playbook initiative designed to transform Erie's East Bayfront Neighborhood. Infinite Erie commends the Hamot Health Foundation and The Erie Community Foundation for funding a feasibility study of the Burton School Project. As a historic site, the Burton School can play a critical role in providing important services to Erie's

neighborhoods. The school can serve as a hub for childcare, pre-K, and workforce development while stimulating the economy by creating jobs and increasing foot traffic.

"Investment in the historic Burton School is vital to transforming a neighborhood plagued by violence and tragedy. With 50% of our population age 18 and under, the highest in the city, bringing the building back to life as a neighborhood hub of education will work to rebuild hope and aspiration among not just our youth but all residents," said Gary Horton, founder and CEO of the Urban Erie Community Development Corporation, which made an offer to purchase the building in February of 2023. "The project is in line with the City of Erie's Comprehensive Plan, Infinite Erie, and the strategic plan of the Eastside Grassroots Coalition. When combined with other projects, like the revitalization of Rodger Young Park and the development of Savocchio Opportunity Park, the Burton project will have a profound impact on the transformation of the Buffalo Road corridor, an area that the private sector has historically neglected."

The revitalization of the Savocchio Opportunity Park was celebrated at the June 15 groundbreaking of the Grow Erie project. An equitable economic development project establishing controlled environment agriculture, the project marks the end of a 15-year effort to revitalize the park and the beginning of a generational transformation of the space. Initially working with Cornell University's Engineers without Borders, who surveyed residents that identified access to land and urban agriculture as a priority, and partnering with the Erie County Redevelopment Authority (ECRDA) and Integrated Agriculture Systems (INTAG), Grow Erie is a public-private collaboration that merges cutting-edge research, technology, and agriculture science with marketplace expertise to produce local goods, create meaningful jobs, and revitalize a long-vacant lot.

"As a key project of Erie's Investment Playbook, Grow Erie will work to transform the East Erie neighborhood through long-term, sustainable, and equitable growth — exactly what the Playbook was intended for," said Kim Thomas, executive director of Infinite Erie. "By ensuring ongoing collaboration between local residents, community leaders, and funders, Grow Erie is transforming Erie by putting plans into action."

MCIC's Grow Erie project was also the first recipient of the Infinite Erie's Community Impact Fund, which the The Erie Community Foundation has already committed \$5 million to. The Grow Erie project, which received \$500,000, directly aligns with what the fund's mission is all about — working to advance progress in Erie County and close the social, economic, and racial inequities.

Collectively, these projects will move the Infinite Erie Investment Playbook forward by focusing on place-based neighborhood initiatives. The CCLT project will increase home ownership, reduce blight, repair housing across the affordability spectrum, and allow BIPOC residents to benefit from the construction boom. Public and private funding can revitalize neighborhoods by reviving commercial corridors, like the Savocchio Opportunity Park, and anchor properties, like the Burton School, ultimately bringing about generational change and increasing equity throughout Erie.

ABOUT INFINITE ERIE

By coordinating inclusive growth strategies to deliver transformative change, Infinite Erie will implement Erie's Investment Playbook and position Erie to attract & secure more public and private sector funding than like-size regions. Powered by the Erie Action Team, Infinite Erie consists of public, private, philanthropic, and civic leadership in Erie County, who bring influence, guidance, and

resources to empower the work of the Delivery Teams and put plans into action. Erie Action Team members include: The Erie Community Foundation, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), Erie Insurance, Jefferson Educational Society, Hamot Health Foundation, Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership, Erie County Redevelopment Authority, City of Erie, Diverse Erie, Erie's Black Wall Street, Urban Erie Community Development Corporation, Greater Erie Economic Development Corporation (GEEDC), and the Office of the Governor of Pennsylvania (ex-officio).

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