

Connections and networking among the top benefits of Blight Boot Camp 2022

Blight Boot Camp 2022 was a resounding success – leaving attendees not only with new knowledge and actionable steps that can be taken to address blight in their communities, but also with resources to assist their fight on blight, including forging new partnerships among other attendees and sponsors.

One such partnership was made between Shari Martino, Irwin Borough Manager and the newly formed nonprofit, *Fight the Blight*. Founded by Matt and Eva Williams, the owners of Equity Preservation Services, a company that deals with the commercial side of blight remediation, *Fight the Blight* is intended to fill in the gaps in service and resources that many municipalities must navigate in their fight against residential blight. Through providing light blight remediation services of their own, and sourcing outside-of-the-box partnerships and solutions for larger blight remediation projects, *Fight the Blight* is taking actionable steps to prove their commitment to their mission of making our communities safe, healthy, and more appealing.

Shari was able to connect with Matt and Eva at Blight Boot Camp; once the three of them realized that their blight remediation goals were aligned and that they were in close geographic proximity to each other, they quickly agreed to work together in some capacity. Shortly thereafter, Shari was officially asked to join the *Fight the Blight* Board of Directors, which she gladly accepted.

The partnership hit the ground running to make impactful blight remediation steps in communities in the area. From exploring potential partnerships with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity to performing an actual cleanup of a Paper Alley in Irwin that had become a local trash dumping site, everyone at *Fight the Blight* is ready to transform local communities!

The Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank of Westmoreland County could not be more thrilled about this, and all the other partnerships and networking opportunities that came from their inaugural Blight Remediation Summit, Blight Boot Camp 2022.

Brian Lawrence, Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank of Westmoreland County, said of the Summit, “We were trying to accomplish a lot with this Summit, from educating the municipal officials and other attendees about what blight is, what it costs us, and how to remediate it, to resources and steps to take to start immediately addressing blight in their communities. However, one of our top-priority goals was to create networking and partnership opportunities between attendees and sponsors.” He continued, “We know that the causes of and solutions to blight do not happen in a vacuum, and for municipalities to be truly impactful in their blight remediation efforts, partnerships will be vital. We are excited to see all the good work that Shari, Matt, and Eva do in cleaning up our communities!”

The Westmoreland County Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank work hand in hand with local officials and like-minded organizations to carry out blight demolition, residential and commercial rehabilitation, acquisition and repurposing of vacant and tax-delinquent properties, accessible and affordable housing, training and education partnerships, historic preservation, and brownfield redevelopment, all to make the communities of Westmoreland County more desirable places in which to live, work, raise a family and prosper. Be sure to follow us on Facebook for more news, updates, and opportunities!