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## **LEVEL Equity Buildings Launches with 100 unit community development program to increase homeownership in Western Pennsylvania**

*Rehabilitation and new construction in partnership with local communities, starting with McKees Rocks.*

**McKees Rocks, PA** - LEVEL: Equity Buildings is proud to announce the launch of its multimillion dollar homeownership and community redevelopment program in McKees Rocks Borough. This 100-unit rehabilitation and new construction project will assist in providing stock for a sustainable homeownership process. This first phase will make 10 rehabilitated homes available to eligible first-time homebuyers across the region. Supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Allegheny County, Borough of McKees Rocks, and Hillman Foundation. LEVEL's transformative work looks to provide a sustainable, long-term solution to address affordable housing.

LEVEL is a 501c3 nonprofit providing a holistic, system-innovating program to simultaneously develop homeowners and housing stock that is complementary to each other and the community. Their scalable model alleviates the riskiest and burdensome aspects of the development process and provides a long-term solution to address housing inequity and affordability. Most importantly, LEVEL is invited into neighborhoods to work alongside and in the community to help current rental residents become future sustainable homeowners, all within their community...not displacing them.

"We're excited to publicly launch LEVEL here in McKees Rocks facilitating dignified, affordable homeownership opportunities for existing residents," said Jason Tigano, Founder and President of LEVEL. "Throughout our country, housing stock remains unaffordable for many people and renters do not feel they can make the leap to homeownership. LEVEL changes that."

LEVEL has been actively engaged in McKees Rocks for more than a year, working alongside community leaders and businesses to redevelop the area's affordable housing stock and prepare residents for home ownership. In this time, LEVEL has partnered with established community organizations already working within the community like the McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation and Focus on Renewal.

Today, LEVEL held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at its first remodeled home on Gardner Street in McKees Rocks, alongside Dennis and Sammie Guy, the first-time homeowners of this first LEVEL home. Allegheny County has allocated \$1.3 million of Community Development Block Grant funds to develop nine additional homes in McKees Rocks. Funds will be used for site development costs, renovation costs, and related professional development services and fees for the nine units.

“Our region is seeing a new vitality and energy, but we need to ensure that the growth is accompanied by efforts to ensure that affordable housing is available in neighborhoods and municipalities throughout the county,” said County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. “LEVEL’s investment in McKees Rocks and the development of its innovative model here provides an opportunity for a new era of housing. We’re proud to be part of that effort, and look forward to the transformation envisioned for this community and its residents.”

In addition to the funding from the county, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development has provided \$1 million in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) support to McKees Rocks—a first of its kind for scattered site residential development—alongside foundation and private funding support.

As of the 2010 Census, nearly 6,000 people live in McKees Rocks Borough in 2,905 households. Nearly one in five residential properties in McKees Rocks is vacant, and many of these properties are blighted and tax delinquent. Additionally, McKees Rocks has seen a significant decline in its homeownership rate over the past few years as properties have been converted to rental units. Only four of every ten properties in McKees Rocks are now owner-occupied, which is critical to maintaining healthy properties and communities.

For communities, LEVEL will acquire, assemble and own real estate—with coaching from the community’s leadership—and provide development and construction management expertise and capacity to Community Development Corporations (CDCs), municipalities, and neighborhoods. For homeowners, LEVEL provides education and a forum to discuss the pathway to homeownership. This includes working with residents to identify service area needs they may have, such as food access, and work to connect that resident to the support that they need.

Establishing sustainable workforce development opportunities is also a focus of LEVEL. By partnering with forward-thinking employers, LEVEL can create employer-assisted opportunities to provide attraction incentives to local businesses and residents of a community. LEVEL has also signed an agreement with the Allegheny County Housing Authority allowing those on the Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly referred to as Section 8, to use their vouchers for mortgage payments instead of for rent, keeping, and building equity for the resident. The Housing Authority currently manages about 6,000 housing vouchers.

“We’re excited to be a part of LEVEL’s innovative program to transform existing physical capital into affordable housing stock in our region,” said Allegheny County Housing Authority Executive Director Frank Aggazio. “Their work to lower the barriers to homeownership and provide sustainable life skills to residents is a model for other communities across the county to collaborate with.”



**About LEVEL: Equity Buildings**

LEVEL: Equity Buildings (LEVEL) is a 501c3 nonprofit providing a holistic, system-innovating program model to develop homeowners, housing stock, and communities at a pace complementing each other. LEVEL works alongside communities to build long-term solutions to address housing inequity and facilitate dignified, affordable homeownership opportunities for existing residents. LEVEL is successful through its innovative approach to real estate and homebuyer education. It simplifies this risky and intensive component of the community development process by acquiring, assembling, and temporarily owning real estate within partner communities. Using the LEVEL Health<sup>SM</sup> score, LEVEL gains a more comprehensive view of the home buyer that goes beyond a mere credit score and provides insight into the wrap-around support the potential homeowner requires, providing a foundation for ongoing monitoring to encourage progress.

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