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Pittsburgh daily news cooperative announcement harnesses nearly 100 neighbors' contributions in town hall

Running from federal court rulings upholding workers' rights, the Post-Gazette is set to close in 3 weeks. Union journalists and community members are building consensus on a sustainable solution.

PITTSBURGH — A crowd spanning several decades in age and neighborhoods in every direction around the city filled 1Hood's Blaxk Box Theater on Wednesday night for the Pittsburgh Alliance for People-Empowered Reporting's (PAPER) first town hall.

The participating audience heard from Post-Gazette union journalists of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh (TNG-CWA Local 38061) and community supporters who had researched alternatives to the Block-owned PG in the wake of the company's announcement that it would close May 3. On Wednesday night, PAPER announced that a multi-stake holder co-operative news publication would best meet its goals, and that it was seeking the creation of that business.

"We've decided to pursue a news organization that's owned by its workers, and the community. A co-op. That's the most exciting part of this," said Steve Mellon, multimedia journalist at the Post-Gazette. "The structure more closely connects the organization to the community, it's democratically run, and it offers greater accountability. It allows us to have a strong voice that amplifies the needs and concerns of those who are often overlooked, ignored, or misrepresented by traditional news media."

Co-operative and/or democratically-run news organizations are already functioning across the country, and beyond, including Defector, The 51st in Washington DC, Hell Gate, Flaming Hydra, The Long Beach Watchdog, Signal Akron, and the Bristol Cable.

Mellon was joined on stage by Allegheny County Councilwoman-at-Large Bethany Hallam, community organizer Tanisha Long, and Ron Gaydos, the director of cooperative development at the Keystone Development Center.

Long and Hallam spoke to the ways in which the current media landscape makes their attempts at serving the community more difficult. Gaydos shared the wide and deep history of co-operative business successes around the world and the country, including in Pittsburgh.

Following the panel remarks the audience split into seven different breakout groups to discuss key questions that would inform the approach of any publication born of PAPER's efforts.

"For people to be galvanizing right now, desiring free press, desiring something that speaks to the people about the issues that they are most concerned about, this is the time right now where I'm one of the most proud people in this room," said Farooq Al-Said, director of operations of 1Hood.

After about 45 minutes of small group discussion — facilitated by a combination of union journalists and community organizers — each breakout reported back its responses to the questions they were asked to consider together.

With town hall participants ranging in age from their teens to their 80s, suggestions included which topics they think need more coverage, as well as information on what journalism they tend to, or would be, willing to pay for.

Thirty-six attendees turned in feedback surveys to further inform PAPER's publication planning. Others donated to the effort.

"Right now we need to put the power back in the hands of the people so we can have trustworthy reporting. And we can do that. This is all insanely achievable, but we have to try," Long said. "A lot of people are afraid to try. Because we've been told these newspaper giants, these corporations, are too big. They're infallible. We can't beat them. But we can. The power of the people will always win if we apply it correctly."

[For more information on co-operatives, check out KDC's Introduction to Co-Ops.](#)

[Further clips from the event are available for download and publication from this linked Google Drive.](#)

For inquiries, including member interviews and other local media requests, contact PGHGuild@gmail.com

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The Pittsburgh Alliance for People-Empowered Reporting, a project of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh (TNG-CWA Local 38061), is a collaboration of union journalists of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and community members seeking a daily news alternative to the Block-owned PG

to serve as a source of communication and connection that reflects the needs of working-class people in the region.