

# GIVE EVERYONE A SEAT AT THE TABLE

> **Zaheen Hussain**

MILLVALE SUSTAINABILITY  
COORDINATOR





### Zaheen Hussain

**F**or far too long, residents and businesses have been left out of the community development conversation and pushed out of their neighborhoods. Community leaders have the responsibility to build ways through which people can interact with their neighbors.

When we don't have relationships with those around us, we weaken our communities and enable gentrification. Poorly advertised and attended community meetings—scheduled at times that can be inconvenient for many, simply to check the public input box—can no longer be the standard.

In Millvale, we try to make sure everyone's voice is heard in our EcoDistrict planning process, guiding the community through sustainable redevelopment. One way we're doing this is through the Millvale Library Community Needs Assessment, a comprehensive survey that is helping us understand what our community members need and want for themselves and their families.

I find it inspiring that in this time of national polarization, there are groups like the Jewish Voice for Peace speaking up against Islamophobia across Pittsburgh. We need to better connect individuals and families of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to build relationships, instead of preaching to people what they should and shouldn't believe.

Creating “a community of we” means giving everyone a seat at the table, empowering each other and connecting with our neighbors to build relationships and empathy.

— Interviewed by Eleanor Chute

### Brian Wolovich

**E**veryone contributes in “a community of we.” We need to bring out our best selves and encourage each other to do the same. Some very simple things aren't being done right now, such as treating each other with respect and empathy, regardless of skin color, religion, ability and language. If we let racism and xenophobia go unchallenged, it can become normalized.

I think a starting point is just stepping back from some of the anger and focusing on our commonalities as opposed to our differences. I know all of our neighbors want a safe, healthy place for their children to grow up. I know everyone wants to be able to get a good job and be educated. On these points, no boundaries or any “-isms” divide us.

Somebody has to start a conversation between two people. Leaders throughout Millvale are reaching out. We're asking residents about their needs, hopes and dreams so we can design programs and investments that are responsive to what people want. We're hoping it will lead to more people appreciating that their voice is being heard and is valued.

In “a community of we,” the distance between decision-making and those who bear the brunt of those decisions is as short as possible.

— Interviewed by Eleanor Chute

# KEEP IT SIMPLE

## > Brian Wolovich

MILLVALE BOROUGH COUNCILMAN AND  
MILLVALE COMMUNITY LIBRARY BOARD MEMBER