



Housing Justice League Newsletter

December 2017

UPCOMING EVENTS

Check www.housingjusticeleague.org/events/ to confirm time and location of events!

January 16 HJL Mass Meeting - 7:00 pm
start, with orientation for newcomers at
6:30 - breakouts of interest for tenant
associations, the BeltLine for All campaign,
and outreach!

January 27 B4All Campaign Canvassing
- 10:00 am - Meet at 1101 Hank Aaron
Drive for a training before canvassing
community members to come out to our
upcoming campaign workshops!

Housing Justice League (HJL) is a community-led organization. Our mission is:

"to empower renters and homeowners to self-organize and defend their right to remain. We fight to preserve affordable housing, prevent gentrification, and build neighborhood power for an Atlanta-wide housing justice movement."

We are always looking for ways to work with and support community members dealing with housing issues. We are excited to hear your ideas and for new leadership. Come to our monthly meetings to join or start your own tenant association, volunteer for a campaign, or help with community outreach.

BELTLINE FOR ALL CAMPAIGN

BeltLine for All now has a designated team of HJL members and volunteers meeting weekly to develop an organizing strategy. Our approach includes educational teach-ins and workshops, holding public officials accountable through our own policy solutions, and direct action tactics to further those goals and reach wider audiences. We are also looking towards developing a model for a participatory planning development project in the Southside. All are welcome to participate in and help lead the campaign. If you are interested, shoot us an email at athousingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com!

The BeltLine report has already left a strong impression on Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (ABI). According to ABI CEO, Brian McGowan, ABI staff

members expressed deep concern upon reading the report. ABI has since reached out to Housing Justice League and the campaign team for recommendations on how to build better relationships with the communities in

which they are working. In response we are developing a list of demands that ABI can start acting on in the short term. In the coming months we will hold community events to get more input



and broaden campaign involvement and leadership. Our initial ideas for the "asks" include:

1. Participatory planning: We propose that the Beltline adopts a participatory planning model for a segment of the Beltline that can then be improved and replicated. That segment of development will be led by community members through a democratic and collective process. We are planning on setting up the guidelines for that process and having them adopt the process we propose.
2. Place a member of the Housing Justice League on the BeltLine board. The HJL member would be a long-term resident of one of the neighborhoods included in the report where the threat of displacement by the Beltline is high.

The BeltLine for All campaign team also created a policy pledge for candidates in the runoff to promise to fight displacement and gentrification through specific policy proposals. After speaking with the Norwood campaign after a mayoral forum at Spelman College, they agreed to sign onto our policy pledge and we received a signed copy from

the campaign a week out from the run-off Election Day. Unfortunately, we did not receive any word from the Keisha Lance Bottoms campaign despite an in-person conversation and multiple unanswered emails. We also received signed copies from Felicia Moore who was elected for City Council President, and Dustin Hillis who was elected for District 9 City councilperson. We will hold those officials who are now in office to their promises.



TENANT ASSOCIATIONS

Sherise Brown has been an instrumental organizer in her work with tenants and with Housing Justice League. Ms. Brown has led projects around the Boynton Village (now called Stanton Oaks) renovations and she contributed part of her story for this month's newsletter:

In August 2014 at Boynton Village we were given a 90 to 120 day notice to relocate because our site had been sold to another owner. Through canvassing and conversations with residents, I understood that there were deep concerns about displacement as well as poor maintenance services. The tenants felt they were being neglected and ignored by the new owners and current management in face of the impending transition. It was very frustrating and no one could give us answers.

We then started having conversation with other community leaders such as Columbus Ward and others involved with Occupy Our Homes Atlanta

(which later helped to form HJL). In September 2014 Columbus had helped to start the Peoplestown Listening Project project, a four-week project bringing the community together to think about and identify issues that were shared within the neighborhood. The Listening Project and I called a tenant meeting at the Emmaus house and we had a conversation around what we were going to do about our situation.

We comprised a petition involving all the concerns for residents to submit and ask the new owner of our complex, the WODA Group based in Ohio, to come and meet with the residents of Boynton village. We petitioned the WODA Group to resolve concerns of neglect, to replace Russell Management after the completion of renovations, and ensure current maintenance workers complete their tasks in a timely matter. We also demanded the right to return for all tenants which would require keeping it 100% affordable within the range of 0-30% area

median income. This was in conflict with the desire of many community folks and City Council who wanted it to be turned into mixed use housing which would have meant many tenants would not be able to return.

The petition was a success with all but two tenants signing on, out of a total



of 55. The WODA Group called after receiving the demands and scheduled a meeting to come to Atlanta in November 2014 and meet with the residents within a week. **We won the right of return for all tenants.**

The tenants agreed that if I would organize a tenant association they would take part in it. We organized a tenant association officially June 2015. Since then I have been keeping conversation open and meeting with tenants door to door, at the mailbox, grocery store, etc. We talk about the transitions with the renovations. We make sure the property management and contractors follow through on their obligations such as putting the bar doors back up after their removal in an unjustified process. I called the contractors and management on this matter as well as the poor lighting in the parking lot.

We now have our bar doors back up and bright lights in the parking lot NOW. We were honored at the National Alliance HUD Tenants conference in June 2015 for helping to preserve our site as affordable Multi-family housing, which is rapidly diminishing nationwide. This is a small victory and it's not over until every resident moves back in as was promised.

There are legitimate concerns around the ongoing development in our community with the BeltLine coming through, and Turner Field Stadium redevelopment. There will be major changes soon and we want to have our concerns heard.

Humbly Serving,

Sherise Brown



NEWS UPDATES

HJL ISSUES STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH PATHE

HJL's membership in the Homes for All national campaign creates valuable opportunities for standing in solidarity with housing rights organizers in other parts of the country. Being part of the national campaign helps people in HJL to understand how the housing crisis in Atlanta is connected with much broader trends of displacement in the US, and to strategize, make

connections, and build power with other people fighting to affirm housing as a human right. With the formation of Homes for All South in October we are becoming increasingly coordinated with other southern housing rights organizers. A recent example of the importance of these types of connections emerged from HJL's participation at the Homes For All Southern Land & Housing

Leadership Assembly in October. At this time we heard from one of our coalition partners, Homes for All Nashville, about recent developments in Nashville's urban planning for a mass transportation project called nMotion that poses threats of gentrification and displacement similar in scale to those of the Atlanta BeltLine.

Homes for All Nashville, together with Democracy Nashville, Music City Riders United, and Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1235 have launched the PATHE (People's Alliance for Transit Housing and Employment) coalition, to demand that binding community benefits including low-income housing, major bus expansion, and living wage jobs, are written into the plan. HJL issued a statement of solidarity with PATHE in recognition of the inevitable economic and racial marginalization the transit proposal will cause without protections and benefits to low-income people.

Nashville's new mayor, Megan Barry, announced the multi-million dollar transportation plan in October 2017, featuring 50 years of tax increases to build 26 miles of light rail, a 1.8-mile transit tunnel underneath downtown Nashville, and four rapid-bus routes, as well as increasing service routes and frequency of the city's existing bus system. A report earlier this year from Mayor Barry's own office warns that by 2025, the city could face a shortage of 30,934 affordable housing units for working-class residents earning between

\$0–41,000 per year, if it does not immediately begin to address the issue.

The plans for affordable housing along the new transit lines, however, only work to provide "workforce housing" for families earning over \$41,000 annually. PATHE is demanding the dedication of at least \$775 million to build tens of thousands of low-income housing units by 2025, only hiring contractors who pay their workers a living wage, and paying at least \$15 an hour to



rail employees and allowing them to unionize. "We need policies that prevent displacement," said Kennetha Patterson, a tenant organizer with Homes For All Nashville, at a PATHE press conference, explaining that rising rents forced her family to move outside Davidson County. "The way this city is developing took away our choice [to stay in our home]... I'm in this fight to make sure the plan doesn't displace more families like ours."

HJL's statement of solidarity:

To Whom it May Concern,
We are members of the
Housing Justice League in

Atlanta, GA, a coalition of neighbors on Atlanta's Southside that came together four years ago to fight for our right to remain in our homes. Our communities have been devastated by a recent transit infrastructure development called the Atlanta BeltLine and we are fighting hard to protect ourselves from further harm. When the city launched this development, it promised much needed services and opportunities to historically disinvested communities. The Atlanta BeltLine sought to better connect a city, segregated by race and class in its very structure, through a new rapid transit system and walkable, bikeable paths. Now, 12 years into this project, all we have to show is mass displacement in historically-disenfranchised communities, a rapidly gentrifying city, and two disconnected bike paths with no promise of public transit in the foreseeable future. We have seen property values skyrocket along the BeltLine corridors, and while we were promised funding for 5,600 low income housing units, funding for only 1,000 units has been acquired. We have been following the recent proposals for transit redevelopment in Nashville and see many of the same warning signs. Massive urban development projects like the Beltline and nMotion must offer strong and explicit investment in the low income and working class communities that will be most impacted by the development.



This requires actively centering the voices of these residents in decision-making processes.

We stand in solidarity with PATHE and Nashville residents as they fight for transit development that does not displace people.

Sincerely,

Atlanta Housing Justice League

To learn more about PATHE visit pathenashville.org.

Homes for All South will host its first major conference to be held in Nashville in April 2018. We are currently looking for people interested in becoming leaders in the housing justice movement to attend the conference. If you are interested in attending or in helping to organize the conference, contact Richard Hunsinger at hunsingerrichard@gmail.com.

Source: Garner, Meg. "Opposition Group Doubles down on Mayor Barry's \$5.2 Billion Transit Plan." *Nashville Business Journal*, 26 Oct. 2017.

HJL ISSUES STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY AUTONOMY

In response to requests from the Atlanta Housing Authority for HJL to protest in support of a lawsuit they are filing against a developer, The Integral Group, we felt it necessary to craft a statement that clarifies the independence of our organization's objectives from those of either party involved. We find our leadership in the voices of the residents that lead us:

Housing Justice League is a community-led organization made up of long-time residents, community stakeholders, homeowners, and renters. We believe that housing is a human right regardless of race, national or ethnic origin, economic background, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or immigration status.

Our mission supports communities facing mass displacement enabled by oppressive and unjust housing policies that intentionally exploit and

segregate communities by race and class. Housing Justice League works with communities to collectively understand and act in our shared interests. We understand that liberation will only come about through collective organizing within communities most affected by injustice and oppression that empowers them politically and builds autonomy.

For this reason, Housing Justice League works for community power, and does not take sides with or follow the leadership of developers or government entities at the city, state, or national level.

~Housing Justice League

This statement was written by HJL's board with input from our members at last month's mass meeting.

HJL OPINION

ATLANTA CITY COUNCIL PASSES NEW INCLUSIONARY ZONING ORDINANCE

On November 20th, Atlanta's City Council unanimously passed new legislation that will institute an inclusionary zoning policy to address the city's current problems with housing affordability. The new policy will affect neighborhoods within the immediate BeltLine Overlay District (all areas within a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of the trail) and the Westside neighborhoods of Vine City and English Avenue. It will require all new residential developments, exceeding ten residential units, to designate a percentage of those units as affordable workforce housing. The policy is the first of its kind to be passed by any legislature in the state of Georgia, and it could potentially be a useful tool in addressing the rapidly rising rents in neighborhoods affected by the BeltLine's development. But while it provides a basis for more commitments from developers for affordable housing production, there are still many issues with the policy, as well as with the effectiveness of inclusionary zoning as a tactic overall.

Inclusionary zoning has seen an increasing amount of support throughout Atlanta in the last few years as the rampant development of high-rent luxury housing in the city has fueled the gentrification of many communities and exacerbated the city's housing crisis. The BeltLine development is a driving force of this boom in luxury housing. To make matters worse, it has failed to fulfill its own commitment to affordable housing, with fewer than 1,000 of the 5,600 units promised in the project's first 12 years. The choice to implement inclusionary zoning first in the BeltLine Overlay District is an attempt to make it easier for the project to reach its affordable housing goal.

What exactly is "Inclusionary Zoning?" Inclusionary Zoning is a tool that creates a link between market-rate housing produced by developers, and the affordable housing needed by the City's workforce populations, by either mandating or incentivizing developers to produce a given share of affordable housing units with every new residential development. With Atlanta's new Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, housing developers

along the BeltLine and the designated Westside neighborhoods will be required to:

- Set aside 10% of the units as affordable for households making 60% of Area Median Income (AMI)

OR

- Set aside 15% of the units as affordable for households making 80% of AMI

OR

- Alternatively, developers may pay what is called an "in-lieu" fee to opt-out of providing the affordable housing requirements. The fee will be placed into a trust fund under the City's control for future development of affordable housing.

While this new ordinance gives the City significantly more control in the development of market-rate housing, it still has many limitations that must be discussed.

First, there is the matter of what income levels are considered "affordable" by the City's definitions. The City of Atlanta's Area Median Income (AMI), according to the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), is roughly \$69,700 a year. For households making 60–80% of the AMI of the City of Atlanta, that would mean income levels between \$42,000–\$56,000 a year. The City's definition of affordability as within this income range shows a very unrealistic idea of what is actually "affordable" for Atlanta's working population. Nowhere in these new ordinances is an effort made to account for the housing needs of the city's population that is most affected by our affordable housing crisis: households that make 50% or less of Atlanta's AMI.

To give a clearer picture of this disparity, the city's population making 60–80% of AMI rests at roughly 14,000 residents, whereas those making less than 60% of AMI are 77,000 of Atlanta's residents. The vast majority of households that have incomes below this 60% AMI threshold of affordability are



in the South and West sides of the city. These areas are those most in need of new and truly affordable housing as the neighborhoods face the potential gentrification due to the recently-opened Westside trail of the BeltLine.

Inclusionary Zoning also contains another problem in that it links the construction of affordable housing to the conditions of the local housing market. This could be an issue as these market conditions are consistently unreliable, leaving us with an unstable production of affordable housing units in the long-term. Even with the production of affordable units mandated by Inclusionary Zoning, we still have the potential for 85–90% of all residential units created in these communities to be

high-rent luxury units.

Considering how rapidly development is occurring around the BeltLine, it does not take much calculation to realize that even with this new Inclusionary Zoning policy in place, this imbalance in affordable housing production has the potential to result in even less affordable housing than we have now, and to accelerate gentrification in economically-vulnerable communities. Unless more aggressive action is taken by the City to preserve its existing affordable housing stock and find ways to expand it outside of handing the responsibility over to developers and the housing market, there is likely to be even less affordable housing than the already severely limited amount we have now.

Sources:

“HUD Median Income – Georgia Loan Limits for FHA, VA & Conforming Loans.” Google Sites, 2017, sites.google.com/site/georgiamortgagelimits/hud-median-income-limits.

“Atlanta, Georgia (GA) Income Map, Earnings Map, and Wages Data.” Atlanta, Georgia (GA) Income Map, Earnings Map, and Wages Data, 2016, www.city-data.com/income/income-Atlanta-Georgia.html.

HJL-PROMOTED EVENTS

January 9 Rosa Burney workshop with Atlanta Volunteer lawyers - 6:00 pm - This workshop will deal with various tenant issues such as do's and don'ts, right to return, and legal assistance. Location TBA at Dunbar Center/ or Rosa Burney Conference room. Contact Deborah Arnold @ cvrbtenantassociation@gmail.com with questions!

**Wishing you a joyous and restful
holiday season!**